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THE MASQUE OF SHADOWS

AND OTHER POEMS.

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THE

MASQUE OF SHADOWS

AND

OTHER POEMS

BY

JOHN PAYNE

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

W. H. ALLEN & Co., 13 WATERLOO PLACE.

1884.

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TO

MY FRIEND

ARTHUR W. E. O'SHAUGHNESSY.

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THIS is the House of Dreams. Whoso is fain
To enter in this shadow-land of mine,
He must forget the utter Summer's shine
And all the daylight ways of hand and brain:
Here is the white moon ever on the wane,
And here the air is sad with many a sign
Of haunting mysteries,—the golden wine
Of June falls never, nor the silver rain
Of hawthorns pallid with the joy of Spring;
But many a mirage of pale memories
Veils up the sunless aisles: upon the breeze
A music of waste sighs doth float and sing;
And in the shadow of the sad-flower'd trees,
The ghosts of men's desire walk wandering.

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ERRATA.

Page 9, line 14, *read* "Did grave strange signs of awe and *doom.*"

Page 112, line 1, *for* "forespent" *read* "*forspent.*"

Page 114, verse iv. line 2, *for* "grass-swathes" *read* "grass-*swaths.*"

Page 118, line 5, *for* "forewent" *read* "*forwent.*"

THE MASQUE OF SHADOWS.

" La mort contient l'espérance infinie."

Leconte de Lisle.

THE MASQUE OF SHADOWS.

PILED earth above my head did lie,
And from my sight the flower-blue sky
Was hidden by a waste of stone,
And I in earth was left alone
To search the secrets of the tomb.

Waste night was there and speechless gloom,—
And I thought not nor wondered,
Nor groped into the dusk with dread,
For Death had crown'd me with a crown
Of Lethe-weeds, that bound me down
In opiate trances. In a swoon
Of death I lay, wherein the moon
Seem'd spread above me like a flower,
That glitters in the midnight hour
Above the glass of some strange lake,
And from it falling dews did slake
My yearning for the coming things.

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Meseem'd my soul had lost its wings,
And could not lift itself away
From out that prison-place of clay.
Strange peace possess'd me and content;
Meseem'd the springs of wonderment
And fear were lapsed from me with death,
And with the 'scape of earthly breath
Desire was dead of heart and brain.

The memories of joy and pain
Had in the life that goes before
The change of being, in the core
Of that great darkness, glitter'd yet,
In characters of silver set
Against the gloom; but in my breast
Their scroll-work was a palimpsest
Whereon no writing, bright or dark,
Did burn. My soul their forms did mark,
As one that looks upon a masque
With absent eyes, too dull to ask
Of what these shadows told and whom:
Death fill'd me so, there was no room
For aught that unto life pertain'd.

And so the ages came and waned
(Meseem'd) and in a sleep of sound
And sight, I lay within the ground,
Lapt in a trance of senselessness.
So hard the stillness seem'd to press

Upon me, that methought I sank,
Athwart the centre black and dank,
A fathom deep with every age:
And, as I went, strange fires did rage
Before me: caverns in the rock,
Wherein pent gases for the shock
Of earthquakes lay engarner'd up:
Red flames, that boil'd within a cup
Of adamant, and grisly shapes,
That mopp'd and mow'd like devils' apes
As I sank past them, like a stone
That to the deepest deeps is thrown
Of some dull sea: and here the ground
Shook with the phantom of a sound,
As if some cataract of flame
Roar'd down the channels without name
That tunnel all the middle world:
And here strange midworld thunders hurl'd
And echo'd, beating back the sound
With lurid jets of flame, that wound
And leapt and crawl'd, like hell-fire snakes
A-pastime.

Now I pass'd grim lakes,
Whereon a silence horrible
Did brood, and from the darkness fell
Into the pool great gouts of blood,
And redden'd all the grisly flood
With livid flakes.

And then again
I fell and fell, athwart a rain
(Methought) of stars, that long had lost,
For some old sin, the glittering ghost
That lit their orbits,—white and pale,
Prick'd out against the grave-grey veil
Of the stern darkness, like a flight
Of moths against an Autumn night,
Spectral and sad.

And now a roar
Of hollow-moaning torrents tore
The ghastly calm, and white wild waves
Rent up the crannied midworld caves
About me: and I saw afar
A phosphorescence like a star
Floating above the grey abyss
Of waters, like a soul that is
Doom'd to dim wanderings o'er the sea
Of some unterm'd eternity.
And as I sank, I felt the throng
Of waves beneath me, and along
The lightless caverns I was borne
Betwixt harsh flaming rocks, betorn
With clash of waves and billows' war,
Towards the ever-distant star,
Set in the mystic veils of gloom.

Roars rent the earth in all her womb,
As, bearing me, the torrent fled

Past all the seats of quick and dead
In the red centre; and the core
Of the huge mountains, that upbore
The pinnacles of heaven, groan'd
With the fierce pain: the black rocks moan'd,
And all the deeps cried out for rage
And fear.

And still, for many an age,
Methought the stream fell evermore
And I with it, athwart the roar
Of clashing powers,—and still the light
Fled farther through the hideous night
Above the grisly torrent-flow
And the rock-cataracts.

And so,
For centuries I fell and fell
Past all the flaming mouths of hell,
Until at last meseem'd the spell
Of sleep that bound me stronger grew,
As 'twere grim hands of darkness drew
Curtains of bronze about my sense;
And all the shadow grew so dense,
That sight and hearing utterly
Were for a time bereft from me,
And I was soulless for a space.

Then suddenly the swart embrace

Of night was slack'd, and all the chains
Of blackness loosed me; and with pains
Unutterable, sense tore back
Into my brain; and with the rack,
I felt that I had ceased to fall:
Then, gazing up through shroud and pall,
I saw the coffin-lid had grown
Translucent as the silver stone
That moulds the flanges of the moon:
And through the lid, a light was strewn
Upon my face, such as is shed
From many a body of the dead,
Night-raised beneath the starless sky
For curséd witchcraft. And as I
Strove towards the glimmer, I was 'ware
That all the bands that bound me there
Had loosed my limbs, and every sense
Was free from thrall: the cerements
Slid off, as mists fall from the day,
And up I stood, a phantom grey
And awful, in the dim blue gloom.

The place was like some old god's tomb,
Built high with grisly walls, and ceil'd
With a black dome-work, like a shield
Of iron wrought with ebony:
And there no thing the eye could see,
Save the gray walls and the pale light,
That seem'd as 'twere the corpse of night,

Rotted to phosphorescency:
But as I paced me endlessly
About the dismal place, that shone
With that strange glitter,—blue and wan
With my long tomb-sleep,—there was shown
To me a postern in the stone,
Built low within the wall to mock
A slit tomb-opening in the rock
Deep hewn.

I push'd the postern through,
And as I strove, the glimmer grew
From out the darkness concentrate
Into blue globes of fire and fate,
And on the lintel in the gloom
Did grave strange signs of awe and gloom,
In unknown mystic tongues that write
Runes in the bowels of the night.

The postern open'd, and I past
Into a place all weird and ghast
With one eternal emptiness:
There was no living thing to bless
The grim dead waste of that sad scape
With any sign of life or shape.
Wave after wave, like a pale sea
Fix'd by some fearful sorcery
To semblant earth, the grey waste spread
As limitless as to the dead

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The death-swoon seems, within a shroud
Of silentness. Above, a cloud
Of vapours, twisted as it were
By winds long died out of the air,
Hung like an imminence of doom:
One felt that never on that gloom
The breath of Heaven had fallen, nor aye
Should fall to all eternity.

Then was my spirit sore dismay'd
By that weird voidness, all outlaid
Before me, like a dead world's ghost;
And back I turn'd me, having lost
All wish for going and desire
Save in the grave to rest from fire
And imminence of mystery.
But as I groped about to see
The backward way, behold the door
Was disappear'd, and there no more
Was any opening in the grey
Of the grim rampire.

Then away
Out of my soul the dull fear past,
And with swift steps into the vast
Grey lapses of the plain I went:
And as I sped my thought was blent
With a strange lightness of desire,
That seem'd to draw me ever nigher
To some completion of my spright.

Wings fail'd me not: I was so light
Of going that I seem'd to float
Upon the greyness, like a boat
Of mid-air souls, that in the night
Is borne upon the waves of light
That ripple round the trancéd moon.

Around me lay the night, aswoon
With second death, so still it was,—
Save now and then a mote would pass
Of strange-hued light, and in the mote
Meseem'd pale presences did float
Of unknown essence. Blue and weird,
They rose on me, and disappear'd
Into the dusk, and suddenly
I was aware that I did flee
In a blue vapour, luminous
With my soul's glimmer, like to those
That fleeted past me.

On and on
I flitted through the darkness wan;
And ever thicker swarm'd the motes
Like to some shining mist that floats
Above a marish,—and anon,
Meseem'd some phantom brightlier shone
A second's space, as it drew nigh
Some other flame, and momently
The twain went, circling round and round

Each other, o'er the grisly ground,
Striving, it seem'd, to meet; but ever
Some viewless hand their love did sever,
And with a shock of rent desires,
They leapt asunder.

Then tall spires
Of flaming bronze rose awfully
Upon the marges of the sky,
And round the flames I saw grey things
That hover'd on their filmy wings
About the turrets, circle-wise,
Striving, methought, towards heaven to rise
On the fierce flood of fire, that bore
The skyward spires, but evermore
The frail wings fail'd them, scorch'd away
By the red flame, and yet the essay
Renewing ever, from the ground
They struggled up and circled round
The pitiless spirals, but again
To be hurl'd earthward in a rain
Of passionate fire-flakes.

Still I fled
Across that desert of the dead,
And past the towers that burnt aloft
Like fixt flames, till the air grew soft
With some strange melody, that rose
Out of the gloom, with close on close

Of sad and vaporous harmony:
One could not tell if it should be
The dim wild wail of sprites forlorn
Or some weird waftings, upward borne,
Of perfume from ghost-flowers of night,
So blended all its sad delight
Was with the measures of a song
And the mute harmonies that throng
And hover from a night-flower's cup:
And as its phrases waver'd up,
Ineffable, from out the night
And its weird silences, each light
Leant to the cadence, and across
The air, the pulse harmonious
Compell'd the ghost-motes to a maze
Of intertwisted rhythmic ways,
A measure of strange guise wherein
The rhythms of the song were twin
With those that sleep in light, and those
That in the perfumes of the rose
Throb dumbly aye, by some strange stress
Evoked from out their silentness
To vaguest life.

It seem'd to me,
The sad strange dance's mystery
Involved all sorrows and all fears,
All ecstasies of hopes and tears,
And all the yearning that survives

To the grey ghosts from bygone lives
And lives to come, if such shall be,
Fore-cast by stress of memory:
A rhythm, slow and interlaced
With trails of pause, as if thought chased
A long-loved memory through a maze
Of desert passion-tangled ways
For ever hopelessly, and ne'er
Could win to grasp the vision fair
And piteous.

And as I gazed
Upon the dances, unamazed
For voidness of a ghost's desire,
A strange faint perfume did aspire
Through all my sense, and with the scent
There came a sudden ravishment
Of dead desires, and there did seize
Upon me all old memories
And all the tyrannies of thought,
A sheaf of all life's shorn threads wrought
To some weird web of wishful pain.
The impulses, that from my brain
Had faded out with life, came back
With the old eddying whirl and rack
Of imminent longing; and the song,
Meseem'd, in all its closes long
And soft, exhaled my very soul
And all its melodies of dole

And striving, wafted through the gate
Of death,—ah, how most sublimate
And shadowy!

And no less methought,
In all the rhythm there was wrought
For me a sense of winding feet
And hands stretch'd floatingly to meet
Celestial hands,—of spiral flames
Wavering up aye towards vague aims
Of rest and spirit-peace fulfill'd:
And with the passion sad and still'd
Of those weird rhythms, all my sense
Vibrated, like a lyre-string, tense
And shaken by a summer wind,
Until the influences did bind
My senses to a following
Of their strange rhythm, and did bring
My will within some mystic spell
Of motion, potent to compel
The uncorpsed essence. So the law
Of that sad ecstasy did draw
My spright to it, and, wavering,
I circled in that mystic ring
Of song and colour and perfume,
Athwart the wide, unbroken gloom,
In a still frenzy of content,
A sad harmonious ravishment
Of wan delights. It seem'd to me

The very passionless harmony
Of aspiration towards the aim
My soul alive could never name,
Much less attain to, fill'd the deeps
Of my void yearning with dim sleeps
Of Autumn-colour'd seas, that lay
And sway'd above the iron grey
Of the grim ocean-bed, and lull'd
The monsters there to slumber, dull'd
With melodies monotonous,
Save one stern thought, that ever was
Implacable, a snake of Fate,
In the mid-cavern deeps await
To fix its stings into my heart
And rend my being with the smart
Of its fell fangs, lashing the foam
To tempest.

So my spright did roam
In those song-govern'd wanderings,
And the flower-breathings from the strings
Of my stretch'd soul drew wave on wave
Of sighing music, faint and grave
As the sad ghost-light, 'mid that throng
Of glimmering presences; how long
Meknoweth not; until, meseem'd
Upon the far sky-marge there gleam'd
A reddening glimmer, and there ceased
Some dele the greyness from the east

Of that sad plain, as 'twere the gloom
Had with long dint of death become
Half phosphorescent.

Through the grey
The shadow-dawn came,—such a day!
There is no saddest autumn night,
Grey with the end of the grey light,
That could its pallor call to mind.
It was as if a worldward wind
Brought up from sea-tombs far away
The shadow-ghost of some dead day,
Long hidden in the shrouds of years,
A day made pale with many tears
And many a memory of affright.
The shadow-sun rose, ashen-white,
As 'twere a star dead long ago
And waked to ghost-life in a swoon,
Beneath the sorcery of the moon;
And as its whiteness wan and chill
Slid through the void, the air grew still:
The mystic measures did forsake
The rhythm of the dance: there brake
The charm of scents that did compel
My spell-bound senses, and there fell
A witchery of silentness
Upon the plains.

Then, press on press,
A mist of dreams rose wavering

40

Out of the earth, and everything
Changed aspect. All the waste did take
The semblance of a shadowy lake,
With shores of marsh, set round with reeds
And armies of grey-flowering weeds:
Across the dull unmirroring face
Of the sad flood, did interlace
A countless multitude of flowers,
As colourless as winter hours:
Great flaccid irises, that erst,
(I dreamed), in life's long summery burst
Had flamed with many a bell of blue,
Mocking the August-tided hue
Of the sweet sky, or sweltered up
From the clear lake with many a cup
Of pers and inde imperial,
But now were grey and hueless all,
Phantoms in that phantasmal air
Of bygone sweets: and too were there
Strange pallid lilies, sad and wide,
Streak'd with dull flakes of grey and pied
With ghosts of many long-dead hues:
And from the flowers accursèd dews
Stream'd up in mists towards the light.

And as I gazed, their scent did smite
Upon my sense, and I was 'ware
That those curst bells the phantoms were
Of the rich summer tide of flowers,

That in its golden-threaded hours,
The passion of my soul pour'd out
From its fresh song-spring. Past a doubt
I knew the blossoms of my spring
And the rich summer's flowering
Of gold and azure, ay, no less,
The autumn's blaze of restlessness
And the dim winter's flowers of snow,—
And all my heart did overflow
With bitterness, to see even these
Lie in the hueless shadow-peace,
Dead and ghost-pale: for I had long
Gladden'd myself, that this my song
Should never die, but 'mid the death,
Day after day, that cumbereth
The fine-strung soul, had comforted
My failing hope with the sweet thought,
(When this my hopelessness was sped,)
That these my flowers, that I had wrought
With pain and urgence of duresse,
Should bloom unsullied from the press
Of world-worn lives and spare for aye
The purest part of me to die.

Full long and sadly did I gaze
Upon them with a drear amaze;
For with remembrance had return'd
The pangs of all the years I burn'd
Towards an unattainèd goal

Receding ever,—till my soul
Was stirr d by a new wonderment,
And from my sense the ghostly scent
Before a fresh impress did flee :
For there was wroughten suddenly
A new enchantment from the veils
Of the drawn mists, and all the sails
Veer'd thither of my soul.

About
The marish-borders started out
A maze of buildings of a dream,
Ranges of steads, that all did gleam
With white fantastic porticoes ;
High temples, with pale ghostly shows
Of colonnades and peristyles,
Prolong'd and join'd for unknown miles,
In maddening endless countlessness.
Grey cloister did on cloister press,
Far stretching on through devious ways
Into the intermittent haze
That closed the distance. Through the veil
Of mists, thin pinnacles did scale
The midmost heaven with mazy spires,
Round which, like ways of men's desires,
The cloisters strove towards the sky.

It seem'd one vast infinity
Of netted ways, most desolate
And awful in their silent state,

Their shadeless symmetry of white:
For, of a verity, one might
Throughout their solemn mystery
Wander a long eternity
And never come to find the end,
Whereto the devious ways did tend
In their dim silence-folded heart.

Then, as I stood a space apart,
No little wondering, from the lake
The mists that hover'd up did take
In the dawn-glimmer shadow-shape
And in pale semblances did drape
Their shimmery essence. All the air
Did teem with ghosts, that down the stair
Of the pale light troop'd from the shore
And the curst marish to the core
Of the unending shadow-town.

Throng after throng they lighted down,
And in grey hosts funereal,
Dispersed through every cloister'd hall,
They flitted in the endless aisles
Of those void mazes,—miles on miles,
Wandering as 'twere with hopeless eyes
And outstretch'd eager hands, mere sighs
Of yearning towards some darling thing,
For which even death could never bring

The death of longing: and meseem'd
Each of the shadowy folk, that stream'd
Along the cloisters, 'twixt the walls
Of mist, had in the shadow-halls
Of the dead dreams, been known of me.
Methought, in each some fragrancy
Of my own unfulfill'd desire
Was prison'd,—and with straining hands,
I strove towards them: but the bands
Of some stern Fate did bind my will
And held me solitary still.

But as I stood and wept for pain
Of my void yearning, o'er the plain
Of weeds and flowers, a low chill breeze
Rose mutely and on me did seize
With all its fluttering hands of wind:
So that my semblance, all entwined
With airy pinions, it did raise
And waft across the still lake-ways,
Like some thin down of daffodil
Or windflower ravish'd up, until
It set me in the midmost court
Of the vast halls, wherefrom athwart
The stillness, all the soundless ways
Fill'd the grey vistas with a maze
Of column'd arches. Then the breeze
Ceased softly from the misted leas,
And in void wonder I remain'd.

Awhile, in a strange calm, enchain'd
By some vague sense of coming Fate,
Mute in the centre court I sate
And watch'd with absent eyes the flights
Of that pale crowd of eager sprites
Athwart the desert columnings:
And now and then, from unseen strings
And pipes, soft sighs exanimate
Of music made the air vibrate
With vaporous rhythms, and there fell
The harmonies ineffable
Of spirit-psalms upon my ear.

And so, through many a lapsing year,
Meseem'd, I sat nor cared arise,
Until betwixt those songful sighs
There swell'd upon my ghostly sense
A breath of mystic ravishments,
Such as had waved about my thought,
When in the earthly life I wrought
My wish to palaces of dreams,
Sun-gilded by no earthly beams,
In visions sweet and intricate.

It seem'd as if some flower of fate,
For this my secret set apart,
Breathed out to me its inmost heart
In trails of perfume, to express
My unform'd longing,—with such stress

Of sympathy it seem'd to speak
To me.

And as I turn'd to seek
The mystic power, that did fulfil
My wish with perfume,—on the sill
Of a low arch, through which a scape
Of aisles began, I saw a shape
Array'd in star-prick'd robes of mist,
Soft sapphire and pale amethyst
And every tender mystic hue
Of emblem'd sadness,—and I knew
A white dream-haunted face, and eyes
Brimm'd with blue shadowy memories,—
A sad sweet mouth, that had alone
In the dim vision-ways been shown
To my desire.

It was, meseem'd,
The perfectness of all I dream'd,
The gathering from strife and storm
Of all my lost ones, in the form
Of a fair woman-ghost revealed.

And as I gazed on her, eye-seal'd
With ravishment, the fair shape came
Towards me, like a mingled flame
Of white and blue, till I could see
Her ghostly beauty perfectly.

There was a light of dim dead grace,
A wild waste beauty in her face,
That told of very tender love
In that sweet world that is above
Our place of shadows,—love and grief
Bounden together in one sheaf
By Death in his pale harvesting.
In her, dead Love had taken wing
Out of the ruins of the past,
A sky-pure thing, that all had cast
Its chrysalis in the grave-hush.

Then, at her sight, my soul did rush
To her embraces, as assured
In her the weakness should be cured
Of its uncompassèd desire;
But she, like a pale lambent fire
Borne by the wind across the glass
Of some still marish-pool, did pass
Out of my reach, within the throat
Of the grey portal, and did float
Along the cloisters tremulously,
Beckoning with backward hand to me
To follow.

Then did I ensue
The steps of that fair spirit, through
A maze of many palaces,
Builded, it seem'd, with mockeries

Of gold and jewels, that had long
Lost their glad soul of light among
The cypress-ways of death,—through halls
Of cunning fretwork, where the walls
Were hung with arras, that of old
Had glow'd with blazon'd pearl and gold
And all sweet colours that one sees
In the fair dream-embroideries,
Wrought by no earthly skill to sheen
And shape of beauty that has been,
Fair histories of heroic times
Gone by and tales from poets' rhymes;
But now alas! the radiant spright
Had from the webwork taken flight,
And of their braveries there was left
Only a grey and filmy weft
Of shadowy outlines, toss'd about
By the sad airs, like some still rout
Of oldworld spectres.

And anon,
As I went on and ever on
Betwixt the arras all wind-blown,
Pale shadows of old feasts were thrown
Across the many vistaed ways,
And banner'd pageants did blaze
And wind along the weed-weft aisles:
Anon ghost-music rose the whiles,—
Rhythms of erst-glad melody,

Measures, whose soul had been of old
A summer-dream of blue and gold,
But now was paled and blanched to be
Void wails of sorrow unconsoled
And voices of a vague remorse.

And often, as upon the course
Of the fair shade, I took my way,
There started spectres from the grey
Of the pale halls and hemm'd me round
With shadow-dances. From the ground
The memories of things gone by
Aspired before me endlessly,
And all the passion of the past
Rose up around me, wan and ghast
With the long death-swoon, and did mock
My forward longing with a flock
Of jeering phantoms, mute as Fate.

In every nook the ghosts did wait
To spring out on me: from the roofs,
Thick with void ghosts of gems, grey woofs
Of worldly-worn desires did flutter
About my head, and there did mutter
From all the caves of echoings
A ceaseless flight of murmurous things,
Wing'd with dead thoughts melodious.

The phantom footfalls did arouse,

As we swept on, a shadow-burst
Of my waste song-shapes, interspersed
With bleeding semblants of the souls
I had outwrought from my own doles
And joys and vestured in a part
Of flesh torn from my bleeding heart.

These all from silence started out
To life and circled me about
With an unceasing rout of ghosts:
And evermore new shadow-hosts
Grew from the mystic gloom, array'd
In trails of shadowy raiment, made
Of all my bygone hopes and fears.

And still, as I did fare, for tears
And weariness nigh past desire,
That lovely shade to me drew nigher
And with soft eyes and finger-sign
Beckon'd me on.

Strange lights did shine
Through vault and cloister, and anon
A phosphorescence, blue and wan,
Shimmering across the shadow-steads,
Show'd where great giants raised their heads
Of shadow to the middle air:
And kings and heroes, very fair
And dreadful, sat in ghostly state

Upon vast thrones, stern shapes of Fate,
More awful than a man shall tell,
Majestic and immoveable.

Now on a cloister'd space we came,
Where, like pale pyramids of flame,
Strove up to heaven the shining weeds
Of all most bright and noble deeds
That men have done or dream'd to do;
And in the cloisters, stretching through
From hall to hall, on either hand,
Dim luminous semblances did stand;
And round the cornice, like a frieze,
Were shadow'd out all phantasies,
Gracious and awful, that on earth
The thought of man has given birth
Or dream-built harmony unto,
Death-paled from all their wealth of hue
And all the passion of their youth.

And as I pass'd them by, the ruth
That did possess me at their view
Took shape within me, and I knew
In all that grey and shadowy state
Of dreams and semblants etiolate,
The phantoms of the unreal sheen,
That glorifies the "Might have been."

Long did we traverse without cease

That awful maze of palaces,
And still, whene'er my soul did faint
For the sad stress of some dead plaint,
The ghost of gladness past, or pale
With agony, desire did fail
For all the horror of the task
And the grey terror of that masque
Of shadowy spectres, that for aye
Did harass me with memory
And ghosts of thought,—that fairest shade
The torment of my spright allay'd
With her soft shadowy azure gaze,
And still I strove along the ways
Behind her and could reach her not.

So we for endless years, methought,
Did fare, and never could I win
To fold her form my arms within;
It seem'd to me, the films of air,
That parted us, of crystal were,
As pitiless as diamond,
Forbidding me to come beyond
The line that did our lives divide.

And ever, as the ages died
And no hope came to my desire
Of its fruition, the pale fire
Of longing, that at first had seem'd
But as a flicker, burn'd and beam'd

Within my soul to such a height
Of aspirance, that with its light
My ghostly semblance, grey and wan,
Grew glorious as a star and shone
With splendour of desireful love,
And all my being flamed above
The greyness of the lower air.
And that shade, too, the pale and fair,
Put on like splendour of desire,
And in like brightness ever higher
Flamed up athwart the shadow-rout
And the pale cloisters, sheathed about
With fire celestial.

So there past
Long centuries, until at last
My eyes were open'd from the ring
Of my own wish and suffering,
And to my new-born sight appear'd,
Against the sky-rack grey and weird,
Myriads of souls, that like a fire
Burnt higher up and ever higher
Towards the troubled firmament.
And as I gazed, the air was rent
With a great singing, as it were
The resonance of a great prayer
And joy for a great ransom won;
And with the shock of it upon
The embattled air, the veils were torn

From the ceiled sky, and there was born
Unto my sense a great delight,
A flowering of awful light:
For there did pass across the heaven
A sword of flaming gold, and riven
Were all the glooms from south to north
And the great radiance burst forth
Of midmost heaven upon us all,
And from the canopy did fall
A rain of heavenly fires, that brake
The crystal walls from us and strake
The mists to splendour.

Then did we
Each upon each in ecstasy
Rush in the ending of desire,
And in that sacrament of fire,
All grossness of vain hope fell off
From the pure essence, and with love
And gladness purged, the perfect spright
Rose up into the realms of light,
Death and its mystery solved at last.

And so with many a song we past
Into the deepest deeps of blue,
A dual soul, that like a dew
Dissolved into the Eternity
That rounds all Being like a sea.

THE RIME OF REDEMPTION.

"Traditur etiam nonnullos vire pervincente amoris ipsum contra summum Domini judicium prævaluisse."

Euseb. de Fid. rebus Epist.

"Some indeed are said to have by very conquering force of love prevailed against the supreme judgment of God."

THE RIME OF REDEMPTION.

I.

THE ways are white in the moon's light,
Under the leafless trees;
Strange shadows go across the snow
Before the tossing breeze.

The night, meseems, is full of dreams,
Ghosts of the bygone time:
Full many a sprite doth walk to-night
Over the soundless rime.

The burg stands grim upon the rim
Of the low wooded hill:
Sir Loibich sits beside the hearth,
Fill'd with a thought of ill.

The fire-light glows across the snows,
In the black night defined:
The cresset-fire flares high and higher,
Toss'd by the raging wind.

The knight sits bent with eyes intent
Upon the dying fire;
Sad dreams and strange in sooth do range
Before the troubled sire.

He sees the maid the past years laid
Upon his breast to sleep,
Long dead in sin, laid low within
The grave unblest and deep.

He sees her tears, her sobs he hears,
Borne on the shrieking wind;
He sees her hair, so golden-fair,
Stream out her form behind.

He hears her wail, with lips that fail,
To him to save her soul;
He sees her laid, unhouselèd,
Under the crossless knoll.

His heart is wrung, his soul is stung
To death with memories:
His face grows white as the moonlight,
And all his words are sighs.

II.

"Ah! would, dear Christ, my tears sufficed
To ransom her!" he cries:
"Sweet Heaven, to win her back from sin,
I would renounce the skies.

"Could I but bring her suffering
To pardon and to peace,
I for my own sin would atone,
Where never pain doth cease!

"I for my part would gnaw my heart,
Chain'd in the flames of hell;
I would abide, unterrified,
More than a man shall tell."

The flame burns red, he bows his head
Upon his joining hands;
The wraiths of old are shown and told
Upon the dying brands.

III.

A hoarse scream tears athwart his ears,
Strange howls are in the air;
The wolves do stray in search of prey
Across the moorlands bare.

Red eyes flame forth from south to north,
The beasts are all a-chase;
God help the wight that goes to-night
Among the wild wood ways!

IV.

The moon is pale, the night winds wail,
Weird whispers fill the night:
"Dear heart, what word was that I heard
Ring out in the moonlight?

"Methought there came to me my name,
Cried with a wail of woe;
A voice whose tone my heart had known
In the days long ago."

'Twas but the blast that hurried past,
Shrieking among the pines;
The souls that wail upon the gale,
When the dim starlight shines.

V.

"Great God! the name! once more it came
Ringing across the dark!
Loibich!" it cried. The night is wide,
The dim pines stand and hark.

The lead-grey heaven by the blast is riven ;
God! how the torn trees shriek !
The wild wind soughs among the boughs,
As though the dead did speak.

VI.

" Loibich ! Loibich ! my soul is sick
With hungering for thee !
The night fades fast, the hours fly past ;
Stay not, come forth to me !"

Great Heaven ! the doubt is faded out,
It was her voice that spake ;
He made one stride and open wide
The casement tall he strake.

The cloudwrack grey did break away,
Out shone the ghostly moon ;
Down slid the haze from off the ways
Before her silver shoon.

Pale silver-ray'd, out shone the glade,
Before the castle wall,
And on the lea the knight could see
A maid both fair and tall.

Gold was her hair, her face was fair,
As fair as fair can be;
But through the night the blue corpse-light
About her could he see.

She raised her face towards the place
Where Loibich stood adread;
There was a sheen in her two een,
As one that long is dead.

She look'd at him in the light dim,
And beckon'd with her hand:
" Dear Knight," she said, " thy prayer hath sped
Unto the heavenly land."

" Come forth with me: the night is free
For us to work the thing
That is to do, before we two
Shall hear the dawn-bird sing."

VII.

He took his brand within his hand,
His dirk upon his thigh:
And he hath come, through dusk and gloom,
Where wide the portals lie.

" Saddle thy steed, Sir Knight, with speed,
Thy faithfullest," quoth she,
" For many a tide we twain must ride
Before the end shall be."

The steed is girt, black Dagobert,
Swift-footed as the wind;
The knight leapt up upon his croup,
The maid sprang up behind.

A stately pair the steed doth bear
Upon his back to-night:
The sweatdrops rain from flank and mane,
His eyes start out for fright.

Her weight did lack upon his back;
He trembled as he stood;
It seem'd as 'twere a death-cold air
Did freeze the courser's blood.

She threw the charms of her white arms
About Sir Loibich's neck:
It seem'd as if 't had been a drift
Of snow on him did break.

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VIII.

The spurs are dyed deep in the side
Of the destrere amain;
The leaves do chase behind his race
And far out streams his mane.

The wind screams past; they ride so fast,—
Like troops of souls in pain
The snowdrifts spin, but none may win
To rest upon the twain.

So fast they ride, the blasts divide
To let them hurry on;
The wandering ghosts troop past in hosts
Across the moonlight wan.

They fly across the frozen floss,
Across the frost-starr'd mead:
Hill, wood and plain they cross amain;
Hill, plain and wood succeed.

IX.

The wild wind drops, the snow-whirl stops,
Frost fades from grass and brere;
The dim clouds die from out the sky
And forth the moon shines clear.

A sudden hush, and then a rush
  Of magic melodies;
A summer wood, with moonpearls strew'd,
  And jasmine-girdled trees.

The lady laid her hand of shade
  Upon the hurrying horse,
And suddenly, upon the lea,
  He halted in his course.

To them there came a fragrant flame,
  A light of elfinry:
The haggard night pour'd forth delight
  And flowers of Faërie.

A wondrous song did wind along
  The moon-besilver'd glades,—
And all the things the elfnight brings
  Did glitter from the shades.

x.

"Light down, Sir Knight, in the moonlight,—
  Light down and loose my hand;
I must be gone,—but thou hast won
  Unto the Faery land."

" By Christ His troth!" he swore an oath,
" No Faery land for me,
Unless thou light thee down to-night,
Therein with me to be."

" Alas, Sir Knight, I must this night
Harbour me far away;
Far be't from thee to rest with me
Where I must dwell for aye."

He smote his breast: " By Christ His rest,
No Faeryland will I!
Rather to dwell with thee in hell
Than lonely in the sky!"

The thunder broke, the lightning stroke
Fell down and tore the earth;
The firm ground shook, as though there took
The world the throes of birth.

The elfsong died, the moon did hide
Her face behind the haze,
And once again they ride amain
Across the wild wide ways.

XI.

The night grew black; the grey cloudwrack
  Whirl'd fast across the skies;
What lights are those the white snow throws
  Reflected in their eyes?

What flames are those the blackness shows
  Rising like rosy flowers
Up to the lift? What ruddy rift
  Shines out in the night hours?

The night is wide: they ride and ride,
  The lights grow bright and near;
There comes a wail upon the gale,
  And eke a descant clear.

There comes a plain of souls in pain,
  And eke a high sweet song
As of some fate whose pain is great,
  But yet whose hope is strong.

Aye louder grow the sounds of woe,
  But the song sweeter still,
Until the steed doth slacken speed,
  At foot of a high hill.

The hazes grey before their way
Divided are in two;
A wondrous sight midmost the night
Lies open to their view.

The hill is strewn beneath the moon
With strange and singing fires;
In every flame a soul from shame
And soil of sin aspires.

From every fire, higher and higher
The song of hope doth rise:
These are the sprights that God delights
To fit for Paradise.

XII.

"Light down, Sir Knight; I pray, alight;
This is the purging-place;
Here shalt thou win to cast off sin
And come to Christ His grace."

"By Christ His troth!" he swore an oath,
"That will I not," quoth he,
"Unless thou too, my lover true,
Therein shalt purgèd be."

"Would God," she said, "the lot were laid
For me to enter here!
Alack! my stead is with the dead,
All in the place of fear;

"But thou light down; the gate is thrown
Wide open in the ward;
See where they stand on either hand,
Angels with downdropt sword."

"By Christ His rest!" he smote his breast;
"No grace of God will I!
Rather with thee damnèd to be
Than lonely in the sky!"

The night closed round, there came a sound
Of trumpets in the air;
The steed leapt on, the fires were gone,
And on the twain did fare.

XIII.

Through storm and night again their flight
They urge o'er hill and plain:
What sounds smite clear upon the ear,
Through dusk and wind and rain?

" Meseems I heard as if there stirr'd
A sound of golden lyres;
Methought there came a sweet acclaim
Of trumpets and of choirs.

" So sing the saints, where never faints
The sunlight from the skies;
So pulse the lyres among the choirs
Of God in Paradise."

XIV.

A singing light did cleave the night,
High up a hill rode they;
The veils of Heaven for them were riven,
And all the skies pour'd day.

The golden gate did stand await,
The golden town did lie
Before their sight, the realms of light
God builded in the sky.

The steed did wait before the gate,
Sheer up the street look'd they,
They saw the bliss in Heaven that is,
They saw the saints' array.

They saw the hosts upon the coasts
Of the clear crystal sea;
They saw the blest, that in the rest
Of Christ for ever be.

The choirs of God pulsed full and broad
Upon the ravish'd twain;
The angels' feet upon the street
Rang out like golden rain.

They felt the sea of ecstasy
That flows about the throne;
The bliss of heaven to them was given
Awhile to look upon.

XV.

Then said the maid, "Be not afraid,
God giveth heaven to thee;
Light down and rest with Christ His blest,
And think no more of me!"

Sir Loibich gazed, as one sore dazed,
Awhile upon the place;
Then, with a sigh, he turn'd his eye
Upon the maiden's face.

" By Christ His troth!" he swore an oath,
" No heaven for me shall be,
Unless God give that thou shalt live
In heaven for aye with me."

" Ah, curst am I!" the maid did cry;
" My place thou knowest well;
I must begone before the dawn,
To harbour me in hell."

" By Christ His rest!" he beat his breast,
" Then be it even so;
With thee in hell I choose to dwell
And share with thee thy woe!

" Thy sin was mine,—By Christ His wine,
Mine too shall be thy doom;
What part have I within the sky,
And thou in Hell's red gloom?"

The vision broke, as thus he spoke,
The city waned away:
O'er hill and brake, o'er wood and lake
Once more the darkness lay.

XVI.

O'er hill and plain they ride again,
  Under the night's black spell,
Until there rise against the skies
  The lurid lights of hell.

The plain is wide: they ride and ride,
  The air with smoke grows crost,
And through the dark their ears may hark
  The roaring of the lost.

The dreadful cries they rend the skies,
  The plain is ceil'd with fire:
The flames burst out, around, about,
  The heats of hell draw nigher.

Unfear'd they ride; against the side
  Of the red flameful sky
Grim forms are thrown, strange shapes upgrown
  From out Hell's treasury.

Black grisly shapes of demon apes,
  Grim human-headed snakes,
Red creeping things with scaly wings,
  Born of the sulphur lakes.

The flames swell up out of the cup
Of endless agony,
And with the wind there comes entwined
An awful psalmody;

The hymning sound of fiends around,
Rejoicing in their doom,
The fearsome glee of things that be
Glad in their native gloom.

XVII.

Fast rode the twain across the plain,
With hearts all undismay'd,
Until they came where all a-flame
Hell's gates were open laid.

The awful stead gaped wide and red,
To gulph them in its womb:
There could they see the fiery sea
And all the souls in doom.

There came a breath, like living death,
Out of the gated way:
It scorch'd his face with its embrace,
It turn'd his hair to grey.

XVIII.

Then said the maid, " Art not dismay'd?
Here is our course fulfill'd:
Wilt thou not turn, nor rest to burn
With me, as God hath will'd?

" By Christ His troth! " he swore an oath,
Thy doom with thee dree I!
Here will we dwell, hand-link'd in hell,
Unseverèd for aye! "

He spurr'd his steed; the gates of dread
Gaped open for his course:
Sudden outrang a trumpet's clang,
And backwards fell the horse.

The ghostly maid did wane and fade,
The lights of hell did flee;
Alone in night the mazèd wight
Stood on the frozen lea.

XIX.

Out shone the moon; the mists were blown
Away before his sight,
And through the dark he saw a spark,
A welcoming of light.

Thither he fared, with falchion bared,
Toward the friendly shine;
Eftsoon he came to where a flame
Did burn within a shrine.

A candle stood before the Rood,
Christ carven on the tree:
Despite the shrine, there was no sign
Of man that he could see.

Down on his knee low louted he
Before the cross of wood,
And for her spright he saw that night
Long pray'd he to the Rood.

And as he pray'd, with heart down-weigh'd,
A wondrous thing befell:
He saw a light, and through the night
There rang a silver bell.

The earth-mists drew from off his view,
He saw God's golden town;
He saw the street, he saw the seat
From whence God looketh down.

He saw the gate transfigurate,—
He saw the street of pearl,
And in the throng, the saints among,
He saw a gold-hair'd girl.

He saw a girl as white as pearl,
With hair as red as gold:
He saw her stand among the band
Of angels manifold.

He heard her smite the harp's delight,
Singing most joyfully,
And knew his love prevail'd above
Judgment and destiny.

* * * * *

XX.

Gone is the night, the morn breaks white
Across the eastward hill;
The knightly sire by the dead fire
Sits in the dawning chill.

By the hearth white, there sits the knight,
Dead as the sunken fire;
But on his face is writ the grace
Of his fulfill'd desire.

THE BUILDING OF THE DREAM.

" Or quester est de telle sorte et ordinance qu'à onc homme ayant mis main ès choses du monde des enchantemens et cuydant de puys d'eulx se departir et se retourner à la vie de dessoubs les astres point ne luy sera licite ne fesable mais force luy sera hors de ce monde au plus tost mourir."

JEHAN DU MESTRE,
De reg. incant.

THE BUILDING OF THE DREAM.

O Love, that never pardoneth,
O Love, more pitiless than Death!
His strife is vain that would express
Thy sweets without thy bitterness!

His toil is vain, for sooth it is
One winneth Love through Death his kiss;
A man shall never know Love's land
Until Death take him by the hand.

O bitter Love! this is indeed
The evil unto life decreed,
That men shall seek thee wearily,
And finding thee, shall surely die!

I.

DESIRE.

THERE dwelt a squire in Poitou of old
times,
Under the fragrant limes
That fringed a city very fair and wide,
Set on a green hill-side;
And round about the city there did go,
Murmuring soft and low

Sweet half heard melodies of days gone by,
A river that did lie
Upon the woven greensward of the fields
In pools like silver shields
Of mighty giants flung upon the grass,
And round the walls did pass
And kiss'd the grey old ramparts of the place
With the enchanted grace
Of its fair crystal shallows, in the morn
Flush'd silver as the thorn
Of a May-dawning, and when day was done,
Rose-ruddy with the sun,
That fill'd the arteries of the land with gold.

Fair was the place and old
Beyond the memory of man, with roofs
Tall-peak'd and hung with woofs
Of dainty stone-work, jewell'd with the grace
Of casements, in the face
Of the white gables inlaid, in all hues
Of lovely reds and blues.
At every corner of the winding ways
A carven saint did gaze,
With mild sweet eyes, upon the quiet town,
From niche and shrine of brown;
And many an angel, graven for a charm
To save the folk from harm
Of evil sprites, stood sentinel above
High pinnacle and roof.

The place seem'd sanctified by quietude,
With some quaint peace imbued,
And down its streets the sloping sunlight leant
On roof and battlement,
Like a God's blessing, loath to pass away,
Lingering beyond the day.

But seldom came the pomp and blazonry
Of clamorous war anigh
The calm sweet place; but there folk came to spend
The days of their life's end
In strifeless quiet, in the tender haze
Of the old knightly days,
That bathed the place in legend and romance.
Haply, bytimes, a lance
Would glitter in the sun, as down the street
The mailed knights rode to meet
The armies of the king of all the land,
And with loud-clanging brand
And noise of many a clarion and a horn,
The bannerets were borne
Before them by their men-at-arms: but yet
The place was unbeset
By actual war, and men look'd lazily
Across the plains, to see
The far-off dust-clouds, speck'd with points of light,
That told of coming fight
In the dim distance, where the fighting-men

Trail'd, through some distant glen
Or round the crown of some high-crested hill,
Halberd and spear and bill,
And to the walls the echoed sound would come
Of some great army's hum
And clank of harness, mix'd with trumpet-clang.
And now and then there rang
At the shut gates a silver clarion's call,
And the raised bridge would fall
To give some knight night's lodging there, who went
To a great tournament
Or act of arms in some far distant town
Beyond the purpled brown
Of the great hills.

But else the quiet place
Slept in a lazy grace
Of old romance and felt the stress and need
Little in very deed
Of the great world, that compass'd it about
With many a woe and doubt
Unknown to it. Yea, for the quietness
And peace that did possess
The town, had many a learned clerk, that sought
Deep in the realms of thought,
Made to himself a home within the walls;
Among the ancient halls
Wrought many a limner, famous in the land,

And many an one with hand
Well skill'd to sweep the lute-strings to delight,
And crafty men that write
Fair books and fill the marge with painted things,
Gold shapes of queens and kings,
Fair virgins sitting in bird-haunted bowers,
And every weed that flowers
From spring through summer to the waning year,—
Here without let or fear
These all did dwell and wrought at arts of peace.

And there, too, dwelt at ease
This squire of Poitou. Ebhardt was his name;
A name not strange to fame
In the old days, when he was wont to bear
Banner and banner'd spear
Before great knights and rend the thickest press
Of foemen with the stress
Of his hot youth. Of old, in very deed,
There once had been much rede
Of his fair prowess and the deeds of arms
He wrought with his stout arms
Upon the enemies of land and king;
And of a truth, no thing
Was wanting to the squire but yet one field
Of fight, ere on his shield
The glorious blazon of a knight should shine,
Before the golden sign

Of chivalry should glance at either heel
And the ennobling steel
Fall softly on his shoulder.

But that day
Was long since past away
Out of his thought, and all the old desire
Had faded from the squire
Of golden spurs and every knightly thing.
For, as the years did bring
The winterward of life, and age began
To creep upon the man,
Came weariness of strife and wish for rest
And thought that peace was best
For those whose youth had left them and the first
Fresh heat of blood, that burst
All bounds and barriers of rugged Fate.
Wherefore he did abate
His warlike toil, and after many a day
He had wholly away
From the grim strife and clangour of the time
Withdrawn himself, in prime
Of later manhood, and in arts of peace
Thenceforward without cease
His mind had vantaged. And, in chief, such quests
As the old alchymists
And nigromancers sought, himself he set
To follow, and forget

The ills of living, seeking in old tomes,
Heap'd up within the glooms
Of scholars' shelves for many a dusty year,
To find the words that bear
The secret of the mysteries of life
And all the problems rife
In changeful being, that for aye anew
Unto the sage do sue
For due solution. Many a year he wrought
At these dim quests, and sought—
Chiefest of all the hidden things that lie
And mock men's fantasy
In the recesses of forbidden arts—
The mystic lore that parts
The soul of man from grinding cares of earth,
And with a new bright birth
More blessèd than the angels maketh him,
And had upon the brim
Of the strange knowledge trembled many a time,
Yet back into the slime
Of the old state fell ever, missing aye
The thing he came so nigh
By some hair's-breadth of crystal pitiless,
That against all his stress
Avail'd to stop his passing heavenward.

So, many a year he pour'd
His strength into the sieve of that strange task,
As in a Danaïd's cask,

And failing ever, ever hoped anew,
And ever did ensue
Upon the well-worn path he loved so well—
Until, one day, it fell
That, studying in an ancient book—fair writ
With chymic inks that bit
Into the pictured vellum of the page
So deeply that with age
The words fail'd scarcely, bound with many a hasp
And quaintly-graven clasp
Of gold and tarnish'd silver,—by some chance
Of favouring Fate, his glance,
That had been wandering dull and listlessly
Amid a prosy sea
Of ancient saws and schoolmen's verbiage,
Lit on a close-writ page,
Whose very aspect made his heart to leap
With some strange stirring.

Deep
And long he search'd the scroll, till on a space
Left wide betwixt the grace
Of woven flowers and goldwork, that the rim
Of the fair script did limn
With such bright broidery of lovely hues,
As ancient folk did use
To beautify their pleasant books withal,
He read a rescript, all
In twisted Greek, contracted to such maze

Of crabbèd Proclus-ways,
That with much labour hardly could he win
To find the sense within
The gnarl'd, rude characters. But well repaid
For all the toil he laid
To the deciphering, in truth, he was;
For so it came to pass
That as the meaning, veil'd at first and dim,
Grew visible to him
More and more certainly, the squire was ware
That in the scroll a rare
And precious secret of the craft lay hid,
Cunningly set amid
A maze of devious words, that, save to one
Long-learn'd and grey-hair'd grown
In all the occult arts, must lead the wit
Wandering astray from it
Among void fancies. But the squire had spent
Long years in study, bent
Over such books, and so was skill'd in all
Devices wherewithal
The ancient masters sought their pearls to hide
From such profane as tried
To fathom their strange mysteries, and keep
Their wisdom dim and deep
For those alone that of the craftship were;
And so, with toil and care,
After much labour from the scroll he learn'd
The thing for which he yearn'd

So many fruitless years; the charm that frees
The soul from miseries
And joys of life: for it therein was told
That, if with virgin gold
Won with his sweat and beaten into shoon,
Under the risen moon,
With his own hands, a man should shoe his horse,
And, braced for a great course,
Should fearless ride into the couchant sun,—
Before seven days were done,
He of a truth should come unto a place,
Where, with unearthly grace
And ravishment, the dreams of his dead youth,
In all their lovely sooth
Beyond imagining, should be upbuilt
Before his eyes, and gilt
With all the gold and pearls and flowers that be
Within man's fantasy;
And there it should be given him to dwell
For ever, 'neath the spell
Of that unchanging magic of his thought,
Wherein no thing unsought
For lack of his imagining should fail,
Nor any note of wail
Nor hum of weary toil should enter there,
But in the restful air
Life should be painless under dream-blue skies,
Gilt by the radiant eyes
Of that fair queen, that all in dreams do love,

Set in the realms above
Our reach, as Dante loved his Beatrice.—
And lovelier things than this,
Ay, and more wondrous, were recounted there
Of how that place was fair
And bright beyond man's thought of earthly bliss.

So, little strange it is
If Ebhardt, reading of the things set down
Upon the vellum, brown
With age, of that old book, grew wonder-glad,
And for a little had
Scarce senses to receive the words he read
And all the goodlihead
Of promise, that the faithful scroll had held
So many a year enspell'd
From all but him the master and adept.
Hot tears of joy he wept
To think there was to him, of all his kind,
Alone such bliss assign'd;
And presently began his thoughts to set
Awork how he should get
This thing he yearn'd for: for the man was poor
And hardly could procure
Fit sustenance. In study had he spent
His substance, being bent
On his strange hopes past thought of worldly gain.
And as he rack'd his brain,
Awhile all fruitlessly, for means whereby

He should make shift to buy
The needed metal, that came nigh to be
The price of a squire's fee,
He suddenly bethought him that there yet,
Uncharged by any debt,
Remain'd to him one little piece of land,
Fruitful enough and spann'd
By the swift Loire; a little vine-set field
Whose fertile soil did yield
A dole of daily substance, scant enough
For all save those that plough
The fields of knowledge; earnt as the reward
Of his young blood outpour'd
On many a foughten field of sunny France;
Which, being sold, perchance
Might, with some curious arms he once had gain'd,
Whileares when Fortune deign'd
To favour him against his foe in fight,
Fulfil the sum aright
He needed to possess the thing he sought.

But if (O woful thought!)
His substance being wasted in this wise,
His glorious enterprise
Should fail, for all his hopes and effort? Why,
What could he do but die?
And to a fighter, death was terrorless.
While, if the Fates should bless

His long desire with the fulfill'd delight,
Would not his soul be quite
Absolved from life and its ignoble need,
Seeing that he should feed
On the fair food of an unearthly bliss,
And with his love's best kiss
And in her sight from all the weary dearth
And stressfulness of earth
Be purified?
So either hap might chance,
Ill or deliverance,
And in no wise should he have need again
Of that unlovely bane
Of our dull lives, that is our curse and stay,
Without which is no way
To live nor with it to live happily.

Wherefore his land sold he
And all his arms, except one suit of mail
Wrought out with many a scale
And ring of steel, and his good sword and spear
And all the warlike gear
He had erst ridden to the battle in,
With age and use full thin
And rusty grown, but still of temper keen
And faithful, having been
A right good armourer's work of middle Spain—
And with the double gain
He bought a lump of virgin gold as large

As a Moor's battle-targe,
Wherewith to work the magic that he learnt
Within the scroll.

There burnt
Within his breast so uncontroll'd a fire
And urgence of desire
To fill the measure of his high intent,
That scarce the day was spent
Whereon he bought the gold, and in the sky
The moon was white and high,
Ere to the rooftop of his house he crept,
And there, whilst all folk slept,
In the full ripple of the flooding light,
Did work the livelong night,
To fashion out the ore with his own hands
Into smooth beaten bands
Of wroughten gold, moulding them circle-wise
Into such shape and guise
As for the seven days' journey should be meet
To guard his horse's feet
Against the highway's stones. The work did grow
Beneath his hands full slow
And tediously; for many a year was past
Since he had labour'd last
At such smith's craft; but yet the earnest will
Redeem'd the want of skill,
And with much toil at last the squire did make

The stubborn gold to take
Shoe-shape.

All night he wrought beneath the moon,
And with the dawn the shoon
Fourfold were finish'd, round beyond impeach,
Pierced with four holes in each;
Nor, for the fitting, to each hole did fail
The needful golden nail
To clasp the circlet through the holes fourfold.
And so it chanced the gold
Was wholly spent to the last glittering grain,
Nor did a speck remain
Of the thick ore when the last nail was wrought;
Wherefore Squire Ebhardt thought
The omen fair, and braced his heart with it.

Then as the night did flit
Across the hilltops in the van of morn,
And the pale lights were born
That in the dawn do herald the young day,
Streaking the cheerless grey
Of heaven with their rose and opal woof,—
Descending from the roof,
Before the daybreak, hastily he clad
The harness that he had
Yet left to him, upon his sturdy breast,
And in his morion's crest
Placed the red plume he had been wont to wear

In the old days, once fair
And flaunting scarlet, but now faded sore.

Then did he strike the four
Worn shoes of iron from his horse's feet,
And in their stead the meet
Gold circlets clasp'd and beat them firmly on.
And now the steed must don
His harness and caparisons of war,
Such as of old he bore,
Chanfrein and poitrail with its rusty spike,
Rerebrace and all the like.

And so,—the twain addrest in everything
For knightly venturing
Needful and meet,—the man bestrode his horse;
And on the appointed course
The old squire sallied forth with his old steed,
As over hill and mead
The young day came with slow and timorous feet,
And the pale air grew sweet
With the clear dew and the pure early scent
Of the waked flow'rets, blent
For incense to the daybreak from the earth;
And in the tender birth
Of morning all things joy'd, and tunes were strong
Of larks' and linnets' song.

So, riding through the dim white streets, as yet
Unstirr'd by all the fret

And hum of daily labour, waking all
The echoes with the fall
Of his steed's hoofs upon the hilly way,
He came to where there lay
Before the gate the guardians of the town,
Upon the grass thrown down
To watch the portal, cross'd with many a bar
And bolt of steel.

Ajar
The wide leaves stood, whilst sleep possess'd the folk
So wholly, that the stroke
Of the squire's horse-hoofs stirr'd their slumbering
But as a doubtful ring
Of sound in dreams, nor all his calling roused
Them anywise, so drowsed
With sleep they were.—And so he thought to make
His outward way, nor break
The warder's wide-mouth'd rest; but as he strove
The ancient gate to move
On its dull flanges, clogg'd with all the rust
Of many a year, and thrust
The half-closed, ponderous leaves apart enough
To give him way, the gruff
Harsh creaking of the hinge that swung for him,—
Breaking upon the dim
Sleep-troubled senses of the folk that lay
Adream beside the way,—
With some faint mimic sound of buckler-clang

And foemen's trumpets, rang
Within the dull dazed channels of their brain,
Snapping the slumberous chain
With which the dream-god held their heavy sense
In leaden-limb'd suspense;
So that they started up from sleep and saw
The squire, that in the raw
Chill morning dimness pass'd athwart the gate;
And wondering thereat,
Caught up bright arms and cried to him to stay.
But he, upon his way
Slackening not, faced round upon his seat,
That so their eyes might meet
A visage that they knew; and they, for friend
Recalling him, did wend
Back to their ward, with many a mutter'd oath,
Born of their thwarted sloth,
'Gainst him that so untimely broke their sleep.

But Ebhardt down the steep
Of the fair hill rode, all unheeding them,
Whilst on the pearlèd hem
Of the far sky the dim day brighten'd up
Into the azure cup
Of the sweet heaven, that lay on field and hill,
All rippleless, until
Its blue deeps broke upon the purple verge
Into a snowy surge
Of swan-breast cloudlets, laced with palest gold;

And then the shadows roll'd
Their mantles round them, and the lingering night
Fled from the coming light.
And so uprose the golden-armour'd sun,
And smote the ridges dun
Of the deep-bosom'd hills and kindled all
Their furrows tenebral
Into a wonderwork of luminous spires,
Hung with the fretted fires
Of dawning, and each crest in the pure light
Grew to a chrysolite
Of aspiration. On each upland lawn
Down fell the dewy dawn
And waked the flowers from their green-folded sleep,
And o'er each verdant steep
Of sloping greensward swept the sun-chased mist,
Ruby and amethyst
With pitiless sweet splendour. Every wood
With the sweet minstrel brood
Grew carolful, with here and there, at first
A note, and then a burst
Of single song, soon swelling to a sea
Of choral ecstasy
And thanks for the young day and the delight
Of victory o'er the might
Of darkness; and each living thing that dwells
Within the cool wood-dells
Or in the meadows, to the awakening

Of that sweet day of spring
Did homage.

So rode Ebhardt onward, through
The cool sweet tender blue
Of the fresh springtide dawning, glad at heart,
Following the rays that part
The morning sky to westward. By the edge,
Purple with flower'd sedge,
Of the clear stream, whose tinkling currents went
Towards the occident,
The stout squire fared, through many a thymy field
With the fresh heaven ceil'd,—
Crush'd with his horsehoofs many a tender flower,
That in the sweet dawn hour
Open'd its gold and azure eyes from dreams
Of the near June's sunbeams,
And saw the kine regardant on the grass,
That aye, as he did pass
Across the greensward on his destrere true,
Wet to the hocks with dew,
Turn'd their slow heads to gaze upon the twain
Awhile, then back again
Bent down their muzzles with a lazy grace
To the rich pasture-place,
Thickset with flowers and juicy herbs.

And then,—
About the hour when men

Are wont to go to labour, and the light
Across the fields grows white
And large with full mid-morn,—the clear stream pass'd
The green sweet fields, and fast
Among the emerald cloisters of a wood
Its farther course pursued,
Streaking the moss with brown and silver threads
And sprinkling the pale beds
Of primroses and windflowers, white and blue,
With its life-giving dew.
And in the ways the light grew dim again;
But through the leaves, like rain
Of gold, the sunshine broke and fell in showers
Upon the upturn'd flowers,
Whilst all the birds made carol to the May,
Answering the brooklet's lay
With choral thanks for all the cool sweet rills
It brought them from the hills.

And Ebhardt, following the river's way,
Rode onward through the day
Along the fair green lapses of the wood,
With many a network strew'd
Of frolic sunbeams; and as he did fare,
Full often was he ware
Of peeping hares and velvet-coated deer
That fled as he drew near,
And couchant fawns, upon the bracken set
For morning sleep, as yet

Unknowing fear, that with great fearless eyes
Did gaze on him, childwise,
Questioning in themselves what this might be,
Clanking in panoply
Of rust-red mail along the ferny maze
Of the cool woodland ways.

The rabbits scamper'd from his horse's feet,
As o'er some woodlawn, sweet
With hyacinths, he pass'd, or down some glen,
Purple with cyclamen;
And now and then, as through the wood he went,
On his strange hopes intent,
There met him some tann'd woodman, stout and bluff,
That with a word of gruff
Early day-greeting did accost the squire.
But else of his desire
No foreign harshness broke the pleasant spell,
Nor on his senses fell
A human sight or sound; but all was sweet
And silent, as is meet
For him that dreams in the fair midmost Spring,
Amid the birds that sing
And the fresh flowers that gladden the old world
With their pure eyes, impearl'd
In many a whorl of virginal faint green.

Far wound the way between

The columns of the trees; and now and then
Some slope of shallowing glen
Ceased suddenly upon an open space,
Where many a fern did lace
The greensward, and the heather put forth buds,
And the red sad-eyed studs
Of pimpernels did diaper the grass.

Anon the squire did pass
Betwixt lush hedge-rows, riding on again
Along some country lane,
Tangled with briers and the early rose
And the white weed that blows
With scented flower-flakes in the flush of May,—
Whereon the shadows lay
Of the new-leaféd trees, that over it
A sun-fleck'd roof did knit
To ward it from the heat.

Now as he went
Adown some steep descent,
Or toil'd along some bridle-path, high hung
Betwixt thin woods that clung
Close to the brow of some tall cliff-spur's steep,
His downward glance would sweep
Across gold plains and cities thick with men,
And many a hollow glen,
Sweet with the blossom'd vines in many a row,
Toss'd seas of apple-snow

And dropping gold of fire-flowers.

Then again,
As on the open plain
The pair paced on and felt the sun once more,
The fragrant breezes bore
To him the distant hum of men and life,
And the clear sounds were rifé
In the far distance of the village bells;
And on the mossy fells,
In the blue skymarge, lay within his sight
Some little town of white,
With roofs rose-gilded by the flooding sun;
For the noon had begun
To hover over hills and charm the air
Into the peace most fair
And stirless of the mid-day. On the wold
Slumber'd with wings of gold
The hours, and all things rested. Not a breath
Told of the late-left death
Of the sad winter; but the world was glad,
As if for aye it had
The fair possession of the lovely May.

And then again the way
Wound down into the wood, and from the dells
Gush'd up the perfumed swells
Of breath from violets bedded in the moss,
And many a hare would cross

The sunn'd green pathway with a sunbeam's speed;
And still the valiant steed
Paced on, unslackening.

So went horse and man,
Until the sun began
To draw towards the setting, and the west
Grew glorious on the crest
Of the dumb hills.

And now the day did fold
Its mantle of deep gold
And purple for its death upon the hills,
And all the pomp, that fills
The tragedy of sunset with the glow
Of a king's death, did strow
The radiant heaven. So down sank the sun,
And so the day was done;
And in the occident the silver horn
Of the pale moon was borne
Up in the gold-tinct watchet of the skies,
And one by one, the eyes
Of the unsleeping stars were visible
In the clear purple bell
Of that great blossom that we mortals name
God's heaven, and there came
The hush of sleep upon the lovely land.

The Dream-god went and fann'd
The air with flower-breathed breezes, and one knew,
In the clear sweep of dew,
The backward wind, that had been wandering o'er
The pleasant fresh-flower'd shore,
And now upon the breast of the dead day
Came back to die away
Into the stillness. Still the west was flush'd,
Until the day-birds, hush'd
By the prone night, gave place to those that hold
The even with the gold
Of their clear grieving song. The nightingale
Began to tell the tale
Of her great poet's sorrow, that is aye
New-born and may not die,
Being too lovely and too sad withal,—
For sorrow may not fall
Into the deeps of comfortable death,
As may the Summer's breath
And the fierce gladness of the July-tide,—
And to his plighted bride
The night-thrush piped, amid the plaited leaves,
And every thing that grieves
Melodiously for the dead day, was fain
To fill the air again
With silver sorrow. So the night fell down,
And in her mantle brown
All weary things addrest themselves to sleep,
And over all, the deep

Sweet silence brooded.

Then the man was tired,
And eke his steed required
His natural rest and some scant truss of food.
So in the middle wood
The squire dismounted, and with ears attent,
Sought for some stream that went
Between the trees; and speedily the plash
Of ripples, that did dash
And gurgle over pebbles, with a note
Of welcome nearness smote
Upon his hearing; and without delay
He came where in the grey
Of the moon-coloured mosses, trickled through
The grass-roots and the rue
A crystal rill, that in the wavering moon
Sang up its changeless tune
To the pale night.

Thither the squire did bring
His horse; then, by the spring
Kneeling, drank deep and long, and looking round,
Spied fallen on the ground
Great store of berries from a neighbouring tree.
Then from the boughs did he
Gather the fruit, and finding it was meet
For human food, did eat

A handful of sweet berries, red and brown,—
And satisfied, lay down
By his tired horse, that had already laid
Himself beneath the shade
Of a great elm, upon the cushion'd moss,
Crushing the flowers across
The twisted grass-stalks in the mossy sward,
For many a fragrant yard,
Beneath his weight; for all the earth was strewn
So thick, beneath the moon,
With all the Spring-tide heritage and dower
Of lovely weed and flower,
One could not tread there but the feet must crush
Many a sweet flower-flush
And broidery on the green earth's bridal gown.

So fell the midnight down;
And still Squire Ebhardt, by his sleeping horse,
Thought of the next day's course,
And for the changeless thought of coming bliss,
Forgot to woo the kiss
Of the fair sleep that is all tired men's due.
But, at the last, the dew
Of slumber fell upon his heavy lids,
And the fair God, that bids
The dreamer to the far enchanted land,
Laid on his brows a hand
Of woven moonbeams; till the thoughts took flight
Into the brooding night,

And with a smiling face, the sleeper lay
And dreamt of many a day
Long lost behind the glimmering veils of time,
And in a golden clime
Went wandering thro' the dreamlands of his youth,
Under the sweet skies' ruth,
Link'd to his lady.

So Squire Ebhardt slept,
What time the sweet night swept
Along the silver woodways, and the hours
Folded their wings on flowers
For peace of moonlight, till the moon 'gan fade
For break of day, that laid
Its cold grey hands upon the purple dusk
And from the hodden husk
Of the small hours drew forth the rosy bud
Of morning, all a-flood
With glittering dews: the golden dawn 'gan wake,
With many a rosy flake
And pearl of sungleams flung across the eaves;
And thro' the screen of leaves,
That overlay the place where Ebhardt slept,
The frolic sunlight crept,
By help of some stray chinks within the woof
Of the green luminous roof;
And kissing all his face, as there outstretch'd
He slumber'd, all enmesh'd

In tangling grass, warn'd him that day was come;
And then the awakening hum
Of the fresh wood and the bright tuneful clang
Of quiring birds, that sang
The accueillade of morning, with the gold
Of the broad sun-glow, told
His drowsy sense that it was morn again,
And he too long had lain
In faineant slumber.

Then did he arise,
And from his heavy eyes
Brushing with drowsy hands the dust of sleep,
Awhile watch'd the light creep
Along the crests; then suddenly bethought
Him of the thing he sought
And how, if he would come to his desire,
Before the sun rose higher
At once upon his forward way he must
Be fain. And so he thrust
His sleep from off him, and with gladsome heart
Addrest him to depart
Upon his second day of journeying.
So, stooping to the spring,
That well'd up through the thyme-roots clear and cool,
He wash'd away the dull
Gross heaviness of night that lay on him.
And standing on the brim

Of the brown rippled pool, he call'd his steed,
That in the neighbouring weed
Did graze; and at his call the faithful beast
Was fain to leave his feast
And to his side came splashing through the fount,
In haste. Then did he mount
Into the saddle without more delay,
And to find out the way
He should traverse, a second he did pause
Half doubtfully, because
The man with sleep was somewhat dazed nor knew
At first what path led due
Towards the setting and the golden west;
Then to the realms of rest,
That lie beyond the day, his face he set,
And spurr'd his horse.

Not yet
The dew was sun-dried from the pearlèd grass,
As steed and man did pass
Along the windings of the forest ways,
Nor the faint scented haze,
That hovers in the vaward of the morn,
Over the flowers, had worn
Its shimmering webs away, in the sun-glare,
Into the thin blue air
That waves unseen between the noontide rays;—
For, seven long Spring days

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From earliest morning to the couchant sun
Must Ebhardt ride, nor shun
The long day's labour,—turning not aside
For aught that he espied
Of fair or tempting,—if he would possess
The yearn'd-for loveliness
Of his high dreams.

So seven long days he rode
Along green pass and road,
From morning-glitter to the even-glome,
Under the blue sky-dome,—
Following his dream through many changing lands;
Now o'er the white sea-sands,
With horsehoofs splashing through the foamy spray
That broke across the way,—
Now passing through the till'd fair fields of men,
Hearkening to lark and wren
And all the fowls whose kindly use it is
Folk with the promised bliss
Of their sweet song, to hearten at their toil,—
Now riding where the soil
Blew thick and sweet with roses red and white,
And with the fair delight
Of minstrelsy the scented air was weft;
And whiles within the cleft
Of many a bare rock and savage hill,

Whose rifts rich gems did fill
To overflowing, and along whose veins
The red gold blazed, like stains
Of sunlight fix'd by some magician's skill.
Through many a mountain rill
Swollen to torrents by the young year's rains,
And over blossom'd plains
Of heathy moorland, undefiled by feet
Of weary men, and sweet
With blowing breezes from the distant sea,—
Through deeps of greenery
And dim dumb churches of the giant pines,
Ranged in sad stately lines,
Waiting the coming of the Gods to be
To hail with hymns,—rode he
Unwearying alway; whilst the golden shoes
Each day some part did lose
Of their soft metal on the pointed stones;
For all along the cones
Of many a mountain range he toil'd, where o'er
No foot had pass'd before,
Save that of goat or deer,—through many a reach
Of grey and shingly beach
And many a flinty pass; nor might aside
Turn from the highway's wide
Rough band of white, that wound out far away
Into the dying day,
To seek the tender greensward of the meads

That lay beside him. Needs
Must he endure the utmost of the toil,
The bitterest of the coil
Of struggles and of hardships, that abode
Upon his wishward road.

II.

ATTAINMENT.

AND now six days of journeying were done,
And eke the seventh one
Drew towards the hour when, in the middle day
The golden lights do stay
Their upward travel in the slant blue sky,
And all the plains do lie
Asleep beneath the sun. And with the flame
Of noon, a change there came
Upon the forward path; for until then
The squire's advance had lain
Through plains and woods and countries known to man:
But now the road began,
Upon the nooning of the seventh day,
To merge into a way
Strange beyond any that a man could know.

Upon the earth below
Strange glittering shells and sands of gray were strown,
And many a blood-red stone,
Changeful in colour; and above, gnarl'd trees
Shook with an unfelt breeze;
And therein many a shape of dwarf and gnome,
Such as, folk say, do roam
About the dreamland's gates, did climb and cling,
Mowing and gibbering
Like uncouth monstrous apes. On either hand,
Gray flowerless plants did stand
Along the highway's marge, and blood-red bells,
Such as for midnight spells
Thessalian witches pluck: and thereabout
Crowded a noiseless rout
Of gray and shadowy creatures. All the air
Was misted with the glare
Of the curst flowers, and the strange baleful scent
That from the herbs was sprent
As for some ill enchantment: and the things
That hover'd there, had wings
And waver'd dimly over Ebhardt's head,
And beckon'd as they sped
Across his path, striving to draw him off
From the highway most rough
And rude, among the pleasant fields that lay
Each side the rugged way,—
Tempting the man with many-colour'd flowers

And semblants of lush bowers
Of trellised foliage, set beside the path
In many a waving swath
Of corn and greensward, easeful to behold,—
Wooing him in the gold
Of the rich meadows to lie down and sleep
Away, in that green deep
Of flowers, the weariness of his long ride.

But Ebhardt not aside
A hair's-breadth turn'd his steed for all their wiles,
Nor for the golden smiles
Of the fair harbours that invited him,
Swerved from the highway's rim,
Clear cut against the far horizon's blaze
Of gold, his steadfast gaze;
But with a firm-set mouth rode on for aye,
Watching the sun now nigh
To death upon the hills, as one that sees
In thought his miseries
Draw to their term, and for no thing nor power
Will, in that fateful hour,
Draw bridle or be tempted from his road.
So ever he abode
In the due westward path, regarding not
The glamours any jot,
That compass'd him about.

Then those strange things,

That with their blandishings
And spellwork strove to tempt him to forego
His long intent, did know
Their efforts void, and with a doleful cry
Evanish'd utterly
Into the twilight and were no more seen.
And as they fled, the treen
Grew green again—the grey herbs wither'd off
And all the sky did doff
The lurid gloom and hazes that it wore.

But Ebhardt, conning o'er
The dim-gold landscape and the purple west
For tokens of his quest,
E'en as he rode, o'er in his memory turn'd
The things for which he yearn'd,—
That of the dreams that had possest his youth,
There might no whit, in sooth,
Be lost for lack of his remembering:
And so,—as with swift wing
His spirit wander'd in the olden ways,
Searching amid the maze
Of memories thick-woven in his mind,—
The hurrying thoughts were twined
Into the fulness of the old desire;
And with the ancient fire
There grew within the chambers of his brain,
Unchanged by years and pain,
The flower-new fantasies of days gone by.

Now was the time to die
Come for the day, wearied to utterest
Of life, whenas the west
Kiss'd its last kiss against the pale sun's lips ;
And now, as the eclipse
Of the red light left void the weeping blue
Of the pale heaven and through
The woven cloisters of the purpled trees
The evening-waken'd breeze
Began to flutter,—upon either hand
Over the weary land,
Faint music sounded from the dim sweet woods,
And the delight that broods
Over fill'd sleep was sweet upon the squire:
And all the man's desire
As 'twere to brim with ecstasy, he heard
The carol of a bird,
That sang as it awhile had dwelt among
The high seraphic throng
And listen'd to the smitten golden lyres
Pulsing among the choirs
Of Paradise, beside the crystal sea,—
And such an ecstasy
Of echoes linger'd at its heartstrings still,
It never could fulfil
Its bliss with memory of those wondrous hours,
But to the earthly flowers
Some snatches of the singing's rise and fall
Strove ever to recall.

Then in the middle road there rose before
The squire a mist, that wore
Strange blazonry of many mingling hues,
As 'twere the falling dews
Were curtain'd in a thick and glittering haze
Across the forward ways;
And in the clear sweet hour before the night
There rose in the twilight
An arch of glitterance upon the hem
Of heaven, like a gem
Built to a rainbow, that 'twixt earth and sky
Grew higher and more high,
And as it grew, the colours that it wore
Shone glorious ever more,
As if it were the portal of the land
Of Faerie.

Nigh at hand
The place beyond that archway of a dream
Unto the squire did seem,
And with great joyance through the bended bow,
That all the earth did strow
With blending lights of amethyst and gold,
He rode, thinking to hold
His dream at once; but, as he pass'd the verge,
The mountains seem'd to surge
In the blue distance like a summer sea,
And the far sky did flee
Along the arch. The golden heaven's rim

Grew paler and more dim,
Receding alway, and the place whereon
He rode was clad upon
With a bright sudden growth of magic blooms.—
Out of the folding glooms
Of the near dusk rose trail on trail of flowers,
And arch'd the road with bowers
Of an unearthly sweetness, marking out
His way, beyond a doubt,
Unto his quest: and as he rode along
The vaulted path, the song
Of the strange bird more rapturous ever grew,
Like an enchanted dew
Of music falling in a silver sea.—
All over flower and lea
A new light pass'd, that was not of the sun,
For all the day was done
And the dim night held all the lands aswoon,
Until the hornèd moon
Should ride pearl-shod across the purple wold.

Then from the rim of gold
That linger'd still on the horizon's marge,
A golden blaze grew large
Of glamorous colour, and within the span
Of the broad arch began
To spread and hold the purple of the skies
And as with all his eyes
Gazed Ebhardt, wonder-dumb,—against the ground

Of purest gold that crown'd
The heavens in the ending of the glade,
There were for him inlaid
Turrets and battlements, a flowering
Of every lovely thing.

Along the marge of the sweet sky there rose
Gold towers and porticoes
Of burnish'd jasper, ruby cupolas
And domes high-hung, topaz
And opal-vaulted; sapphire campanelles
Held up their flower-blue bells
Against the gold sky; silver fountain-jets
Between the minarets
Threw high their diamond spray, and fretted spires
Flamed up, like frozen fires
Of amethyst and beryl, past the height
Of lofty walls of white,
Thickset with terraces aflame with flower.—
Shower upon scented shower,
The blossoms rain'd from high and bloomy trees,
Before a scented breeze,
That fill'd the air with balms and orient gold.
And on its waftings roll'd
Across the plains a singing sound of lyres
Smitten from golden wires,
And clarion-notes, wide-spreading like a sea
Under a company
Of joinèd voices, murmuring softest words

To music like white birds
Winnowing the foam of some gold Indian bay.
Lay murmur'd unto lay
From out that dwelling of a God's delight,
Following each other's flight
To greet the dreamer with their blissful stress,
And pipes and lutes no less
Yearn'd up to him with strains of welcoming.

And Ebhardt, lingering
As 'twere before his all-fulfill'd desire,
Knew all those towers of fire,
Sun-glancing, and the flower-fleck'd terraces,
And in the harmonies,
Wide-winging through the crystal air agleam
With gold-flakes, knew his dream,
As of old times he had pourtray'd the place
With all its changeful grace
No moment same, for all the golden dew
And all the flowers that blew
And shimmer'd like a noon-mist thereabout.

So with a glad heart, out
Through the flower-arch he rode and came unto
The portal, sculptured through
With pictures of a dream in chrysoprase
And beryl and a maze
Of blossoms of the jewel that in one

Is flower and precious stone,
Being clear hyacinth,—wroughten by no hand
Of man.

The leaves did stand
Wide-open for his coming, backward roll'd
Even to their flange of gold.
So in he rode and saw the white town spread,
In all its goodlihead
Like nothing earthly, very still and wide,
Upon his either side
Far-stretching like a vision of the night
Beyond his further sight.

The place was overrun with flowerage
Of wondrous blooms that wage
War with the sun in many an Orient clime:
Great silver bells did climb
The gabled turrets with their linking chains,
Mix'd thick with crimson skeins
And chalices of sapphire. In the ways
Gold-paven, rose a maze
Of trellised porticoes and white dream-steads;
And in the mossy beds
Of the gold flowers, strewn like a rain of stars
In every court, through bars
Of gold one saw clear lakelets lay and toy'd
With the white swans, that joy'd
To sport in their cool pleasaunce; and the air

Was tuneful with the fair
Clear tinkle of the crystal rills that ran
Across each flowerbed's span
And fed the grass-roots.

And as down the street
Rang out the horse's feet,
Calling strange lovely echoes from their cells,
Flute-notes and silver bells,
That broke the silence with a songful spray,
There ran in the midway
Unto the man a sudden cloud of girls,
With breasts like double pearls
Rose-tinted by long sojourn in the gold
Of some far Orient, stoled
But in the waving mantles of their hair:
Tall maidens, dusk and fair
With the long gilding kisses of the light,
Fresh from the fierce delight
Of plains of golden Ind and Javan seas,
Shook on the fragrant breeze
Rich scents from lotus-cups; and Grecian maids,
Under their night-black braids
Cinct with the green acanthus, did advance,
Link'd in a rhythmic dance:
Fair girls came, crown'd with white narcissus-stars,
From rose-strewn plains of Fars;
The lithe mild maids of gold Pacific isles
Brought him their pearly smiles

And olive brows set clear with eyes of black:
Nor to his sight did lack
Women with faces of the rosy snow
Only the west can show,
In whose fair ivory for double light
Two tender eyes and bright
Were set, the colour of the spring-sky's blue
Hazed with the early dew,—
And down their shoulders fell a fleece of gold,
In many a ripple roll'd
Of sun-imprisoning locks.
And these beside,
From every portal's wide
Gaped folds came out into the golden street,
Eager the man to greet,
Bright shapes of every radiant eye-delight
Of lovely women dight
In pleasant raiment, that a dream can heap
Up in the aisles of sleep.

Then those fair creatures,—waving like a sea
Of gold and ebony,
For all the mazes of their floating hair,—
Smote the clear jewell'd air
With songs of triumph and of welcoming;
And while their lips did sing,
Their hands strew'd jasmines in the horse's path,
And with a scented swath
Of violet and rose and orange-stars,

Hid every sign of wars
And toil that cumberèd the valiant steed.

Now in the song indeed,
And in the varied beauty of the girls,
Set clear in clustering curls,
Were easance and delight for any man
That since the world began
Loved girls and song and the soft cadenced beat
Of golden-sandall'd feet
On thick-strewn flowers; and there might well the fire
Of any man's desire
Be quell'd and satisfied with loveliness
And all its dreams possess
In those fair women, with their flowery kiss
And their descant's clear bliss.
But Ebhardt cherish'd in his heart—made clear
By many a weary year
Of void desire—the memory of a face
Of an unearthly grace
And glory, that had smiled on him in dreams,
Woven, it seem'd, of gleams
Of pure spring suns and flowers of white moonlight,—
And for the memory, might
Have pleasance in no woman save in this,
That was his Beatrice
And queen of love.

So all unmoved he went
By any blandishment
Of that fair throng, slowly adown the street,
Hoping his eyes should meet
Her eyes for whom alone his heartstrings shook.

Then, seeing that the look
Of yearning died not from the seeker's eyes,
Circling in bright bird-wise
The fair crowd broke before his onward route;
And from the rest came out
A maiden, robed in falling folds of green
And crown'd with jessamine
And myrtle-snows, that took his bridle-rein
And led the steed, full fain,
Along the fragrant carpet of the way,
Towards a light that lay
Far in the westward distance like a flame
Of gold.
Behind them came
The frolic crowd of girls, following the twain
With showers of blossom-rain
And rills of song, until they brought them where
Pillars of pearl upbare
A dome of lustrous sapphire, flank'd with spires
That pierced the sky like fires
Up-flaming from the golden furnaces
Of middle earth, 'mid trees
Ablaze with flowers of gold.

Before the gate
The maiden did abate
Her onward way and bade the squire alight.
Then on the pavement, white
With scented snows, the man sprang lightly down
And with his gauntlet brown
Smote on the golden trellis such a stroke,
That all the echoes woke
Thereto: and therewithal the gold leaves split
In twain and did admit
The sight through archways into many a glade
Of gardens, all outlaid
Beneath the heaven's kisses.

Entering
Therein, the maid did bring
The squire, through many dwellings of delight,
Into a place where light
Lay full and soft a velvet sward athwart.
There in the middle court
Circled with jewell'd cloisters all around,—
Upon the emerald ground
Of gilded mosses broider'd with all flowers
In stories of the hours
That through the spring and summer bear the year
Over the flower-beds clear,—
There was a throne of gold and coral set
With many a goodly fret
Of ivory work, upon the suppliant heads

Of strange fair quadrupeds,
Most like a lovely lion with girl's eyes,
Upborne; and, warder-wise
Around the throne, stood maidens white as milk,
Vestured in snowy silk
Banded with cramozin, and pages fair,
Clad all in pleasant vair
And silver, that so thick and numberless
About the throne did press,
One might not see the visage of the Crown'd
That sat thereon.
Around,
Among the roses and the tulip-beds
Thick-vein'd with silver threads
Of tiny trickling rills, fair birds of white
And red did stalk, and bright
Peacocks and doves of every lovely hue,
Golden and green and blue,
Trail'd jewell'd plumes along the garden-ways
And with the goodly blaze
Of their full splendour so did fill the bowers,
It seem'd all fairest flowers
Had put on wing and motion, to fulfil
Their beauty at the will
Of some enchantress of the olden days.
About the glancing ways
Of the bright garden ceaselessly they went,
Weaving its ravishment
Into fresh groups of colour and delight.

And as their pageant bright
Eddied and wound among the garden-grots,
From all their fluted throats
There was a vaporous choral song exhaled,
As 'twere the spirit fail'd
Within them, for delight, to shape its bliss
Into the words that kiss
The ear with perfect music, and was fain
For very rapturous pain
Of ecstasy to lapse into a song.

Now on the glittering throng
Long time the squire had gazed, held in a trance
Of joy, nor dared advance
His spell-bound feet; and oft for bliss he sigh'd.
But that fair maid, his guide,
Laid hands on him and brought him, through the crowd
Of maidens snowy-brow'd,
To the mid-garden, where the throne was set.

Then did the man forget
All things that blazon'd earthly life for him,
And all his dream grew dim
Before a new-born wonder: for, as there
He stood, he was aware
Of a fair shape that sat upon the throne,
Such as to him was shown
In dreams the image of his Queen of Love.

Clear was her brow above
The crystals of the snow for purity,
And round its ivory
Were set seven silver stars for diadem
Upon the waving hem
Of the rich tresses, that did ripple down
A flood of golden-brown,
The colour of the early chestnut's robe,
When yet the summer's globe
Is but half rounded out with flower and sun.
And from the stars did run
Commingling rays of many-colour'd light,
That with a strange delight
Fill'd all the trancèd network of her hair,
Wherein for all men's care
Were set soft anodynes and balms of sleep.
Within her lips, a deep
Of coral garner'd up its pearls a-row,
And in her arching brow
There were two eyes unfathomable set,
Wherein might one forget
The glance of the dead friend of bygone years
And the sweet smile through tears
Of the lost love of youth; for they were clear
And soft as a hill-mere
After spring-rains, whenas the early dew
Has fallen in its blue,
And yet with some strange hints of deeper tones,
Such as the June night owns,

Before the moon is full, when the clear stars
Ride on their jewell'd cars,
Queenless, across the purple of the skies
And the day-murmur dies
Under the vaulted dome of amethyst.

With such lips Dian kiss'd
Endymion sleeping on the Latmian sward:
From such twin eyes were pour'd
The philtres of the summer night upon
The evil-fortuned son
Of Priam, smitten with a fearful bliss.

Whoever had the kiss
Of her red lips kiss'd never woman more,
Having attain'd the shore
Of that supernal bliss the ancients sought
So long, but never wrought
To find,—the very perfectness of love.
Upon one hand, a dove,
Pearl-white and with a golden colleret,
Was for a symbol set,
And in the other one, lys-blooms she held,
Gold-cored and snowy-bell'd,
The sceptre of her queendom.
'Twixt the snows
Of her fair breast, a rose,
Mix'd red and white, lay droop'd with heavy head,
As with the mightihead

Of love that fill'd her presence all forespent.

And as on him was bent
That full sweet visage, its sheer perfectness
Of glory did possess
The squire with such a wondering delight
Of bliss, and such a might
Of hurrying thoughts, that for the very fire
Of his fulfill'd desire
The life well-nigh forsook him; and eftsoon
He would have fallen aswoon
Before that Lady of all loveliness,
That from the ardent stress
And furnace of his dream to shape had grown.

But she, to whom were known
The passions that within his soul did meet,
Descending from her seat,
Bent down and in her ivory arms embraced
His neck and all enlaced
His failing visage with her woven hair,
Holding him captive there
Within a gold and silver prison house.
Then, parting from the brows
His ruffled hair, she kiss'd him on the mouth;
And suddenly the drouth
Of yearning, that so many years had tried
His spirit, did subside,
And was all quench'd within a honied deep

Of kisses, that did steep
His soul in ravishment ineffable
And restful.

So there fell
A woof of sleep upon his every limb;
And in the trances dim
Of twining dreams, he heard a silver song
From all that glittering throng
Of lovely girls and jewel-plumaged birds
Fill all the air with words,
That (if with devious weary earthly speech
One might avail to reach
Some echo of their sweetness) in this wise
Somewhat did fall and rise,
Like sea-waves beating on a golden bar
Of sands, but lovelier far.

Song.

I.

Low laid in thyme
And nodding asphodels,
Dream on and feel flower-fragrance kiss
Thy forehead free from all the dints of time:
Thou shalt awake to greater bliss,
Bounden with linkèd spells
Of love and rhyme.

II.

Fear not, pale friend,
Thy dream shall ever die:
Thou hast attain'd the shores of rest,
Where the wave-break against the grey beach-bend
Brings up sad singings from the West
No more. Here Love is aye
Sweet without end.

III.

For here the grief
And sadness left behind
With weary life are turn'd to gold
Of dreams: from stern old memories a sheaf
Of strange delights unfold
Their sweets, like flowers we find
Under a leaf.

IV.

Here in this deep
Of grass-swathes piled with flowers,
All things most fair and loveliest,
Too pure for earth and all her toil to reap,
Do lie and crush the fruits of rest,
And all the golden hours
Lie down to sleep.

V.

Here Love doth sit,
No longer sad and cold,
As in the weary life of men
The hard stern need of toil has fashion'd it;
But very pure and silver-clear again,
And withal red as gold
For crownals fit.

VI.

Here hope is not,
Nor fear: for all the ease
One wearied for in worldly strife
Were but as nought beside one pearly grot
Of this fair place, and all a life
Of fears herein would cease
And be forgot.

VII.

Hath any dole?
Bird-songs are comforting,
And all the flower-scents breathe of balm:
Dream on and soothe the sadness from thy soul;
For here life glitters like a calm
Of summer seas that sing
A barcarolle.

VIII.

Count life with flowers!
This is our dial here.
A kiss and violets twined around
The brow; soft sleep in honeysuckle bowers,
Lilies and love with roses crown'd,
Sweet scents of eglatere
Cadence our hours.

IX.

Dream within dream;
Dreaming asleep, awake;
There is no sweeter thing than this,
To lie beneath flower-snow and fountain-gleam,
Save if with touch of lips and kiss
One win the sleep to break,
Yet hold the dream.

III.

FALLING AWAY.

O the song hover'd over Ebhardt's sleep,
By many a silver sweep
And many a golden sigh of horns and flutes
And broidery of lutes
Within the failing cadences sustain'd:
And, as he slept, the stain'd
Worn harness and accoutrements from him
Were borne, and every limb
Was purified from all the dust of toil
And all that journey's soil,
In essences of all the balms that be
In Ind or Araby
For purging all life's weary stains and sad.

Then on the man was clad
Fair raiment, thrice in Tyrian purples dyed,
Gold-fringed and beautified
With broidery of pearl-work silver-laced;
And on his breast they placed

A golden owch, rare-wrought and coral-chain'd.
And as the singing waned,
The magic slumber slid away from him;
And therewithal the dim
Sad doubts and weariness of earth forewent
The man, and there was lent
To every limb a perfectness of ease,
As in the golden seas
Of some spell'd ocean he had bathed and cast
His age off.

So he past
With that fair queen athwart the dreamy land,
Wandering, hand in hand,
Through many courts and jewel-vaulted halls,
Wherein the trellis'd walls
Show'd through the sunflecks,—carved and limnèd o'er
In all the lovely lore
Of Faërie and all the glitterance
Of Orient romance;
And in one chamber,—thick with jasmine stars
Woven betwixt the bars
Of gold that latticed all the sides from floor
To roof-tree, vaulted o'er
With one clear bell of sapphire silver-ray'd,—
Them side by side they laid
On beds of sandal wood and cramozin;
Then did fair maids bring in

A banquet, set and sweet in golden shells,
Mingled with great flower-bells
And cups of jasper and corneliand.
There peacocks did expand
Their jewell'd fans, fresh from the fairy looms;
Herons with argent plumes,
Untorn by falcon, lay on silver beds;
And opal-blazon'd heads
Of dove and culver glitter'd out through green
Of bedding moss. Between
Gold lilies lay the silver-feather'd swan,
Reclined in death upon
Lush leaves of vine and flowers of oranges;
And every bird that is
For pleasant food ordain'd, in vine leaves wet
With crystal dew, was set
Before the twain, each in its several room.
And from the jewell'd gloom
Of ocean-deeps there came its lovely things,
Gold fish with silver wings,
Great diamond-sided carp with opal eyes,
Dolphin that ever dies
A rainbow glory and an eye-delight;
Sword-fish, and shell-fish bright
With ruby armour, mullets gold and grey,
And all the rest that play
Among the hyacinthine cool sea-deeps—
Where many a coral creeps
'Mid pearls and weeds of every lovely hue—

Until themselves endue
The radiance of the pearl and coral things
And the clear colourings
Of feather'd sea-flowers thick about their life.
These all and more were rife,
Outlaid—for food of men to godship grown—
In many a precious stone
Graven with silver to the mimic cup
Of that fair flower that up
From the still lake holdeth its silver star,
That men call nenuphar.
There did the beehives yield their amber dew,
Glittering pale golden through
The frail white fretwork of the honeycomb;
And in their velvet bloom
Shone gold and purple fruits of the year's prime,
That in the Autumn-time
Of some far wondrous land had hung and glow'd,
What while the winter rode
On his pale horse across the stricken earth;
And the clear soul of mirth
And love was there in chalices of wine,
Such as no earthly vine
Has ever dreamt of in its dreams of June;
And all the place was strewn
With jewels full of juices wonder-sweet,
That seem'd for kings more meet
To wear upon their brows, than to suffice,
Even in Paradise,

Unto men's hunger. Over all there fell
A shower of asphodel
And almond-blossoms, and the air did rain
With roses.

So the twain
Lay at the banquet upon silken flowers,
Whilst through the gradual hours
Bright sights and sounds did charm the time's advance
For them. One while, a dance
Of wood-nymphs glitter'd circlewise across
The windflower-sprinkled moss,
That paved the halls; or from the fountain's deep
Of silver sands would sweep
A flight of green-hair'd naiads, dripping gold
And pearls from every fold
Of their wet hair and weed-ytangled dress;
And then, perchance, the stress
Of silver clarions and the sweet sad thrill
Of the struck harps would fill
The air, preluding to a cavalcade
Of lovely shapes array'd
In cramozin and azure,—dames and knights
And all the eye-delights
Of the old pageantries of queens and kings;
And to the cadenced strings
And reeds swell'd up the clash of shields and spears
And the fair dreadful fears

Of the bright battle and the hot tourney:
The clang of the sword-play
Rang out from targe and morion, and the ring
Of lance-points shivering.
The banners and the tabards ebb'd and flow'd,
The jewell'd crownals glow'd
In tireless changeful splendour; and the haze
Of the far-column'd ways
Did burn with glancing mail and blazonries
Of all bright hues one sees
In the fair pictures of the olden time.
And oft with many a rhyme
The minstrels fill'd the pauses, in quaint lays
And songs of bygone days
Hymning the praise of many a champion
Of times past.

So slid on
The dream along the halls of phantasy,
Folding him blissfully
Within a rapturous calm; but, more than this,
That crownèd lady's kiss,
The woven magic of her tresses' gleam
And her soft eye's sunbeam,
Fetter'd the dreamer in a silken trance
Of masterful romance.

Now, as the meal was done with many a song
And luting from the throng

Of pearl-limb'd girls,—the curtains of the day
Over the golden grey
Of the sweet sky were drawn; and the clear night
Came with its own delight
Of lambent stars and heavy night-flowers' scent,—
Whenas the firmament
Hangs o'er the earth like some great orange-grove
Wherethrough the fire-flies rove
In some far night of Orient,—to enspell
The senses; and the bell
Of the slant sky grew hung with fretted lights.
For never fail the night's
Enchantments in the land of dreams (as say
Some makers) nor the day
With its sheer splendours satisfies the sense;
But the restful suspense
Of the sweet midnight is as welcome there
As morning, being fair
And full of lovely spells of peace and rest
Graven on the palimpsest
Of day with star-runes; nor without the night
Could one have love's delight
In perfect fulness.

So the night was spread
Above the golden bed
Of those two lovers, whilst the harefoot hours
Trail'd through the rosy bowers
Of that fair dream-stead, on the moonlight's wings;

And all the lovely things,
That fill the interspace betwixt sundown
And the new-risen crown
Of morning spread upon the Orient crests,
Hover'd about the breasts
Of that fair lady, as she lay asleep,
Folded in peace as deep
As the blue heaven with the gold stars fleck'd.

And when the new morn check'd
His coursers for the sweep into the sky,
And from the bravery
Of newborn day the glamours of the night
Folded their wings for flight
Where through the dusk the sun had made a gap,
Those lovers from the lap
Of their sweet slumbers rose, and, hand in hand,
Look'd over the fair land
And saw the eternal spring grow young again
Over each hill and plain
Of that enchanted paradise of sweets:
And the delight, that beats
To amorous tunes within the spring-flower-blood,
Spread out its silver flood
Upon their spirits, like a radiant mist
Of philtres; and they kiss'd
Again with doubled rapture.

In mid-green,

Under tall stately treen,
In noble woods they wander'd, where the birds
Hail'd them with golden words,
Clearer and lovelier than earthly song;
And all the pure-eyed throng
Of wood-flowers held sweet converse for their ease.
The blue anemones
Murmur'd quaint tender fairy-tales of spring
And of the blossoming
Of elfin souls in every pale sweet bud;
The fragile bells that stud
The moss with cups of sapphire, when the year
Brings round the Midsummer,
Sang mystic songs for them of summer nights
And all their deep delights
Of panting stars and singing nightingales;
And heather-bells told tales
Of elfins dancing on the thymy sward,
What while the white moon pour'd
Full hands of pearl upon the breezy moors.
And as along the floors
Of spangled moss they went, beneath the woofs
Of leaves, the tiny hoofs
Of deer smote softly on the woodland lawns,
And the lithe brown-eyed fawns
Laid velvet muzzles on their toying hands.

Now along golden sands
By sapphire seas they walk'd, thick strewn with
shells

Of each bright kind that dwells
In seas, and watch'd the gold fish dart and flash
Across the cool wave-plash,
And the curl'd foam slide up and fall away
Into a silver spray,
As the great plangent waves broke, green and white,
In sheets of malachite.

Then would the queen take Ebhardt by the hand,
And from some jut of sand
Down diving through the gold and emerald waves,
Visit the coral caves
Of the sea-nymphs and all the palaces
Of crystal, under seas
Built for the Nereïds' pleasance,—wandering
Along the deeps that ring
With mermaids' song, and plucking living flowers
That in the deep sea bowers
Wave for the mermen, gold and blue and white.

Or with a calm delight
The twain lay floating on the silver foam,
Watching the azure dome
Of heaven wide-ceil'd above the emerald leas,
And the light fragrant breeze
Wafting the silver cloud-plumes o'er the blue.
Haply, some bird that flew,
Wide-winging, towards the golden-stranded East,
Sometime its travel ceased

At her command, and in her ivory breast
Nestling, awhile would rest
And murmur stories of the wondrous things
Each day of wing-work brings
To one that pulses towards the rising sun.

And when the morn was done,
Mayhap, returning to the land, the queen
Within some heart of green
Would sit and hold the man within her arms,
Weaving with many charms,
For him to living shape and lovely sooth,
The memories of youth
And the quaint fancies of his wildest dreams,
Re-clad with golden beams
Of mystic splendour, ever fresh and new;
So that but now he knew
How very full his every thought had been
Of all the lovely sheen
And glamour of the land of phantasy.

Over the dappled lea
And the slant hillside, violet-starr'd, would rise
Before his ravish'd eyes
Fair crystal castles and enchanted bowers,
Trellised with magic flowers,
That in their every calyx held a face
Of an unearthly grace.
Horn-notes came faint and far upon the breeze;

Between the moss-clad trees
Fair ladies pass'd, with greyhounds falcon-eyed
And pages at their side;
And knights rode forth a-questing. Down the sward
Many a pageant pour'd
Of the quaint elves that hold the ancient woods,
And the gnarl'd race that broods
Deep in the jewell'd chambers of the rock:
Or with her milk-white flock
Some dreamy shepherdess went sauntering by,
With flowerful hands, and eye
Fix'd on the petals of some rose of gold.

And now the lilies told
The twain that day drew fast toward the dark.
Then did they both embark
In some fair shallop's pearl and ivory side,
And down the glancing tide
Of some full river, over-hung with trees,
Glided before the breeze
That fill'd the silken sails; 'twixt terraced walls,
Past rows of ancient halls
And towers far-glancing 'gainst the golden sky;
Where all the courts did lie
Ungated, and the dying sun sloped slow
Along the evening glow
Through range on range of golden palaces,

Glittering on lattices
Of blue and silver, tenantless and still.
A strange sad peace did fill
The lonely streets; and through the voiceless air,
Perchance, some breeze would bear
The silver sound of bells, whose music spread
In circles overhead,
Widening far out upon a stirless sea
Of silentness.

Maybe,
At times, the man would deem himself alone
In some fair meadow, strown
With bright-eyed flowers, or on some river's bank,
Where rank on plumèd rank
Sedges blew purple; when, as he did deem,
That sovereign of his dream
Had for a little faded from his side:
And at the first he sigh'd
To find her place left empty suddenly;
But soon he knew that she
Was ever with him, if invisible.
Whether some cowslip's bell
He idly broke or pull'd a violet up,
Straightway from out the cup
A sweet face look'd; two tender dewy eyes
Gazed deep in his, and sighs
Of ravishing sweet music fill'd his ears,
Until his soul with tears

Of joy brimm'd over: then two lips would seek
His own, as 'twere to speak
All things' love to him in a fragrant kiss;
And ravish'd with the bliss,
He would press closelier on the flower and find
It was the queen that twined
Soft arms about him and laid lips to his
With such a flower-bell kiss,
Being both flower and bird and breeze and queen.

Or,—look'd he in the green
Of some fair crystal pool all fringed with sheaves
Of the nesh flower that weaves
Soft green and rosy-white of blooms around
Each lake that in the swound
Of the mid-June lies stirless,—there would grow
From out the depths a snow
Of starry lily-petals, that between
Their golden-gaufred green
Unfolding, show'd to him a tender face,
Crown'd with a dripping grace
Of gold-brown hair, that through the waves rose high
Upon his lips to sigh
The soul of amorous longing. Being seen
Full, it was still the queen,
That in no wise could let man's love grow cold,—
Being so manifold
And rich in heart, that as each flower she knew
To love, or as the dew

Wooeth the moonbeam's kisses: she could take
All shapes of love that wake
Under the skies: whether the nightingale
Telleth her amorous tale
Unto the argent-blossom'd thorn,—the winds
About the pale woodbinds
Flutter with loveful longing, or the bees
Around the anemones
Fly with a bridal murmur; she could win
Her eyes to looks akin,
And prison all their passion in her lays;
And in all other ways
Wherein on earth is love made manifest—
So that each loveliest
And peerless for the hour of love should seem—
That lady of a dream
Could twine the souls of mortals with delight.

Nor with the deathless light
Of love alone was Ebhardt's being blest:
Around his footsteps press'd
An ever-changing sea of lovely things;
The radiant flowerings
Of all the poet-hopes a dreamer knows,
While yet the dewy rose
Of his fresh youth is wormless for the years
The wraiths of the waste tears
And the pure phantoms of the dear dead past

Came back to him at last
In a new guise of shapes emparadised:
For nothing it sufficed
Unto the perfecting of his desire
Of old, that for the squire
The happy shapes alone of his strange dreams—
Woven all of sunbeams
And griefless flowers—should be fulfill'd for him:
He must possess the dim
Ethereal sadnesses that were so sweet,
Before the stern year's feet
Crush'd all the glory from the soul of pain;
And in his sight again
Must the impalpable essence new abide,
Sublimed and glorified
By the transfiguring splendour of his dream:
The much-loved dead must seem
To walk with him the blossom-trellis'd ways,
And the remember'd gaze
Of all the friends he loved in times gone by
Meet him in every eye
Of flower-cups blinking in the mossy leas;
And in each fragrant breeze
Belovéd voices murmur him again
Old songs of love and pain
And hope undying.

So the man did move
In one long dream of love,

And all his life was one great fairy-tale,
Wherein no thing did fail
Of the bright visions he had wont to see
In his fresh youth.

* * * *

Ah me!
That joy should be so strong and pitiless
And mortal men no less
Inapt to bear its agony of sweets!
That the delight that beats
In the full veins should be the enemy
Of this frail flesh! That we
Should ever prove so uncreate to bear
The things that are most fair
In our idea,—should faint and die before
The dream of bliss is o'er!
Alas! we can bear sorrow and the stress
Of earth's dull weariness,
Day after day eating our bitter bread,
Silent, with tears unshed
And life still pulsing dumbly; but the kiss
Of the full rapturous bliss
We dream of withers us with its delight;
And back into the night
Of our despair needs must we fail and fall,
Finding dull custom's thrall
And the dumb pain of daily life less keen

And deadly than the sheen
Of the bright bliss to us unbearable!

* * * *

So it to Ebhardt fell
That he must be divorced from the delight
That with such godlike might
Of will he had prevail'd to win,—being strong
To dare and to prolong
His days in strife, cheer'd by some distant hope
Dim-radiant in the scope
Of the dull daily sky,—but not enough
Strong for the splendid love
Of that enchantress and the unearthly bliss
That in that oasis
Of dreams was his. Old was the man and weak,
And wearily the wreak
Of the hard years had worn the youth from him,
Deadening in heart and limb
The soul of fire that erst burnt fresh and high.

So, when the ecstasy—
Awhile by that excitement of his quest
Conjured within his breast
Out of the cinders of the ancient fire—
Grew cold, the feeble sire
In the full tide of bliss was like to drown.
The stressful glories strown

About his life did burn and weary him
Beyond his strength; his dim
And age-worn sense fail'd with the ecstasy;
And thus it came to be,
That in the gold and purple of the land,—
Midmost the arms that spann'd
Him round, the lips that on his lips did lie
And the deep orbs that aye
Flooded his spirit with their tireless light,—
Through all the dear delight
And glory of that life of flowers and dew,
Within the man there grew
A longing, half-unconsciously, to wear
Once more the weight of care
That deadens all the lives of mortal men,—
A wish to feel again
The dull repose of the eventless days,
And from the stressful blaze
Of that too-radiant dream once more to fade
Back to the level shade
Of thoughtless men's dull daily round of life,
Wherein there was no strife
Of earthly parts and forces to suffice
To joys of Paradise
Whose fire none scatheless save a god might know.

So day by day did grow
The longing, 'spite his wish, within his thought;
Albeit hard he fought

To conquer it, in all his looks it show'd;
And all that bright abode
Was grown to him like some fair hurtful fire
Of o'er-fulfill'd desire,
That eats the heart to madness.

And one day,—
As on the breast he lay
Of that fair dame, and in the radiant deep
Of her strange eyes did steep
His soul in burning languor,—it befell
That the unquellable
Desire burst up, no more to be repress'd,
Out of his weary breast
With a great bitter cry; and he was fain
To tell her of his pain
And of the mortal weakness, that in him
Stretch'd out—towards the rim
Of the sad world and the dull life-long bands—
Weary and weakling hands
Of backward longing, being all too frail
And world-worn to avail
For the hot passionate splendour of the things
Of his imaginings.

"The dreams of youth come back to me too late,
Sweetheart," he said. "The gate
Of kindly death gapes wide for me; and I
Would fain go back to die

Among the towns and cities of my folk,
Under the wonted yoke
Of mortal custom; for I am but man,
Nor for all longing can
Shake off the leaden hand of age and use.
And now my limbs refuse
To bear the bliss of dreamland any more,
And all my soul is sore
With the long struggle. I had all forgot—
Whilst that the flame was hot
Of the new-found delight—that I was old,
And that the creeping cold
Of death came very nigh upon my feet:
But now I feel it, sweet,
And may not tarry with thee any more,
That, with slow steps—before
The pale Archangel touch me—I again
May for awhile regain
The tents of men and die among my kin,
Repenting of my sin
And grasp for things beyond the reach or ken
Of miserable men.
Wherefore, I pray thee, kiss me yet once more—
For all my heart is sore
For parting from thee—and unspell my feet;
So haply I may greet
The dwellings of my kind before I die."

So he with many a sigh

Spake to the queen, and told her all his mind.
And she,—that had divined
And known his yearning many a day and long,
Yet ever did prolong
The time of parting with the man,—with slow
Sad loving speech said, "Go:
I may not bid thee stay with me, poor friend,
That to the common end
Of weary men draw'st nigh, and (being man)
Labourest beneath the ban
Of the all-conquering pain and may'st not bear
The bliss thyself didst rear
In thy high fancy. Go: I love thee still,—
Better, perchance,—and fill
Thy destiny; for Fate is over all,
And one may not recall
The ordinance of God that fashion'd us,
Albeit despiteous
And very sad it seem." And kiss'd him thrice
Upon the brow, in guise
Of parting.

Then the shape of her 'gan fade
Into the purple shade,
And the bright dreamland melted into air.

And Ebhardt,—standing there,
Upon a desolate sweep of heathy plain,
Whereo'er the night did wane

And the June day came from the golden sills
Of heaven on the hills,—
Saw all the towers of gold and jasper fall,
And knew beyond recall
His dream-built world with all its lovely might
Faded into the night;
And the hot tears brimm'd up his agéd eyes.

Then close to him did rise
The carol of a lark; and it befell
That with the song the spell
Of grief was lighten'd, and some sadden'd peace
Came back to give him ease,
Upon that sunward hymning of the bird.
And looking round, he heard
A joyous neighing, and his true old steed
Came to him in his need,
And rubb'd its head against his hand.

So he
Mounted and o'er the lea
Rode, as the sun across the hills grew fair,—
And in the innocent air,
The flower-scents told of the fair midmost June,
And the sweet early tune
Of the waked birds sang of the faded Spring
And the new flowering
Of the fresh fields with all the Summer weaves

Of bloom,—and in the sheaves
Of yellowing corn, the sunlight lay like gold
Of consolation, told
By the dear God unto the earth rain-worn
And weary and betorn
By snow and tempest.

So the old Squire rode
Upon the homeward road,
Among the fields, where all the world was glad,
And none that he was sad
Had time to note,—and with the dying day
Came to a town, that lay
Childwise within the bosom of the hills,
And in the peace that fills
The hour of sunset, slept beneath the sky,
In one great panoply
Of crimson glory. And, indeed, it seem'd
Most like the thing he dream'd
Of the celestial city, where alone
This flesh shall have outgrown
The feebleness of life.

And so he came
Into the town, all lame
And worn with travel and his hopes down cast;
And there he found at last
A little weary rest among strange men,

And was at peace again.
And there a resting-space he did abide;
And in the Autumn-tide
A little while thereafterward he died.

SIR FLORIS.

"A un chevalier de Provence vint ennuit un appel miraculeux et luy fut IN NOMINE CHRISTI par trois fois mandé soy lever et ensuyvre une colombe blanche : ce que fesant fut mené danz un jardin mirificque ou avecques grant poine occist sept bestes mescrées que auters ne furent que li sept pechiés mortels. Adonc fut merveillousement emporté par dessus les mers au Mont Salvat ou gist receleiment le sacrosainct Greal. La fut accolé chevalier du Greal et voire luy apparust nostre Seignour et luy baisa de sa propre bouche. Sur ce perdist connoissance et lors de son resveil soy trouva chiez luy. Cy-après erra maints ans par le monde ouvrant loiaument ès choses de son servage : aussi dict on que ce durant fut par deux fois de plus visité de ladiste colombe et puis fut en toute vie ravi fors de ce monde. Cert est toutes fois que ne rapparust mais aux yeulx humains."—*Le Violier des Histoires Provenciaux.*

TO THE AUTHOR OF LOHENGRIN.

THE ROMAUNT OF SIR FLORIS.

IN this sweet world and fair to see,
There is full many a mystery,
That toil and misery have wrought
To banish from the sight and thought
Of striving men in this our air
Of pain and doubt, and many a fair
Sweet wonder that doth live and move
Within the channel of Christ's love.
And of these, truly, aforetime
Was made full many a tender rhyme
And lay of wonder and delight;
And by full many a noble knight
And minstrel was the story told,
With the sweet simple faith of old,

Of how the questing was fulfill'd
Of that Sangreal that was will'd
By the dear God to Galahad,
And how by many a one was had
Rare venture in the holy Quest,
Albeit very few were blest
With comfort in the sight of it;
And by that menestrel, to wit,
(Oh sweetest of all bards to me
And worthiest to Master be
Of all that sing of Christ His knight
And Questing of the Grail!) that hight
Of Eschenbach, the tale was writ
Of Percivale, that now doth sit
Within the bosom of the Lord,
And how he strove with spear and sword
Full many a year for Christ His grace.
And with delight of those old lays,
There long has murmur'd in my brain
A song that often and again
Has cried to me for utterance;
And now—before the sad years chance
To bear all thought of holiness
From men with mirk of pain and stress
Of toil—it wearies me to tell
Of all that unto Floris fell,
And all his toil and all his bliss
And grace in winning to Christ's kiss.

Wherefore, I pray you, hearkeneth
The while with scant and feeble breath
I tell to you a quaint old tale,
Wherein is neither sin nor bale,
But some sweet peace and sanctity:
And there not only wonders be,
But therewithal a breath of love
Is woven round it and above,
That lovers in the Summer-prime
May clasp warm hands o'er this my rhyme,
As finding there some golden sense
Of Love's delicious recompense:
For what withouten love is life?
And if therein is any strife,
Or therewithal offences be,
I pray you pardon it to me:
Wherefore, Christ hearten you, I say,
Et Dieu vous doint felicité.

I.

THE FIRST COMING OF THE DOVE.

HARD by the confluence of Rhone
A castle of old times alone
Upon a high grey hill did stand,
And look'd across the pleasant land;
And of the castle castellain
And lord of all the wide domain
Of golden field and purple wood
And vineyards where the vine-rows stood
In many a trellis, Floris was;
A good knight and a valorous,
And in all courtesies approved,
That unto valiantise behoved.
Full young he was and fair of face,
And among ladies had much grace,
And favour of all men likewise:
For in such stout and valiant guise
His years of manhood had he spent
In knightly quest and tournament,
There was no knight in all the land
Whose name in more renown did stand,

And the foe quaked to look upon
The white plume of his morion,
  When through the grinding shock of spears
  Sir Floris' war-cry pierced their ears
And over all the din was blown
The silver of his clarion.

  So was much ease prepared for him,
  And safety from the need and grim
Hard battle against gibe and sneer
That must full oft be foughten here—
  For evil fortune and the lack
  Of strength to thrust the envious back—
By many a noble soul and true;
And had he chosen to ensue
  The well-worn path that many tread
  For worship, all his life were spread
Before him, level with delight.
But if in shock of arms and fight
  Of squadrons he disdainèd not
  To win renown, the silken lot
Of those that pass their days in ease
And dalliance on the flower'd leas
  Of life was hateful to his soul;
  And so—when once the battle's roll
And thunder was from off the lands
Turn'd back and from the war-worn hands
  The weapons fell—he could not bring
  His heart to brook the wearying

Of peace and indolent disport
Of ease. Wherefore he left the court—
  So secretly that no one knew
  Awhile his absence—and withdrew
A season to his own demesne,
And there in solitude was fain
  To yearn for some fair chance to hap
  And win his living from the lap
Of drowsy idlesse with some quest,
That should from that unlovely rest
  Redeem him to the old delight
  Of plucking—in the bold despite
Of danger—from the brows of Fate
Some laurel. Nor had he to wait
  The cooling of his knightly fire;
  There was vouchsafed to his desire,
Ere long, a very parlous quest,
That should unto the utterest
Assay his knightly worth and test
  The temper of his soul full well
  And sore. And in this wise it fell.

It chanced one night,—most nigh the time
When through the mist-wreaths and the rime
  The hours begin to draw toward
  The enchanted birthnight of the Lord,—
That in the midnight, on his bed,
He heard in dreams a voice that said
  "Arise, Sir Floris, get thee forth,
  An thou wouldst prove thee knight of worth!"

Gross slumbers of the middle night
So held and clipp'd the valiant knight,
  He might him not to speak address
  For slumber and for heaviness.

Again it rang out loud and clear,
So that he might not choose but hear,
And in his heart he quaked for fear;
  But still he lay and answer'd not,
  Such hold had sleep upon him got.

A third time through the chamber past
The voice, as 'twere a trumpet's blast:
  "Arise, Sir Floris, harness thee,
  For love of Christ that died on tree!"

He started up from sleep for fear
And groped to find a sword or spear,
Thinking some enemy was near;
  But of no creature was he ware.
  He saw the moon hang in the air—
As 'twere a cup of lucent pearl—
And in the distance heard the swirl
  Of waters through the silence run;
  But other sight or sound was none.

The moon's light lay across the night
In one great stream of silver-white,

And folded round the Christ that stood
At bedhead, carven in black wood;
And Floris, looking on the way
Of light that through the chamber lay,
Was ware of a strange blossoming—
As of some birth of holy thing—
That in the bar of silver stirr'd;
And as he gazed, a snow-white bird
Grew slowly into perfect shape,
As if some virtue did escape
From that strange silver prisonhouse
Into the city perilous
Of life, and for its safety's sake
The likeness of a fowl did take.
The light seem'd loth to let it go
Into this world of sin and woe
(So pure and holy) and put out
Long arms of white the dove about,
As if to net it safely in:
But, as the holy bird did win
Its way and through the meshes rent,
The rays of light together blent
And fell into a cross of white,
Whereon the silver dove did light
Above the image benedight.

Sir Floris wonder'd at the sight,
And looking on the cross, he deem'd
That from the Christ a glory gleam'd

And lay in gold towards the door;
And something bade him go before.

He rose and girt himself upon
With helm and with habergeon,
And in his hand his sword full bright
He bore, that Fleurdeluceaunt hight.

The dove flew out into the air,
And Floris follow'd through the bare
Dumb ways and chambers to the gate,
Whose open leaves for them did wait,
And as into the night they past,
Together were behind them cast.

The night was dumb, the moon did glower
Upon them, like a pale sick flower
That in the early chill of spring
Mocks at the summer's blossoming,
And over every hill and stowe
The ways were white and sad with snow.

So pass'd he, with the silver dove
That went before him and above,
Within the sheeny moonés light—
Wherewith her outspread plumes were dight
So that it seem'd each wing became
And grew into a silver flame—
Until the hollow'd snow was track'd

Into a woodway, where there lack'd
The moonlight, and the mountain-side
With drooping ash and linden vied
To keep the hollow place from ray
Or glimmer of the silver-play.

The dove flew in, and, following,
Sir Floris heard a muffled ring
Of silver in the mountain's womb,
As if dead music there had tomb.
Here the dove folded wings and smote
The part wherefrom the sound did float.

The mountain open'd, and they went,
By force of some strange wonderment,
Into a place of flowers, all sprent
With jewels of the blossom-time;
And all the air was sweet with rhyme:
There reign'd an endless summer-prime.
Tall green was there of leaféd trees,
And in the blossom'd walks the breeze
Was music, such as winds and plays
About the May-sweet woodland ways,
When spring is fresh and hope is clear;
And in the place, where leaves are sere
On earth, there lay great heaps of gold,
Yweft by wonderment untold
To semblance of the Autumn's waste,
Through which the sweet wind play'd and
chased

Its frolic breaths with perfume laden.

In grass stood many a white maiden
That lily in the outworld hight;
And roses all the herbage dight.
Bright plaited beds of jewel-flowers
Were thick-set in the garden bowers,
And many a row of sunflowers stood
Along the marges of the wood,
And to the sapphire heaven turn'd,
As if towards the sun they burn'd.
About the blossoms, round and over,
Strange golden-crested birds did hover
That flash'd and sparkled like a flight
Of wingèd starlets in the night;
And, as they went, their pinions beat
The air of that serene retreat
To rush and sweep of magic song,
And through the trees was sweet and strong
The trill of lark and nightingale.
There was not any note of wail
In song of birds or sweep of wind,
Such as in woodlands calls to mind
The last year's winter and the next,
Wherewith the listener's soul is vext
And thinks how short the spring will be,
And how the flower-times change and flee
Towards the dreary month of snows.
The full glad passion of the rose

Was joyous in the garden air,
And every sight and sound was fair
With unalloy'd contentedness.
There could not enter any stress
Of labour or of worldly woe;
But ever through the place did flow
A silver sound of singing winds,
A breath of jasmine and woodbinds,
As if all joy were gather'd there
And prison'd in the golden air.

And as Sir Floris wonderèd
At those sweet flow'rets white and red,
And at the stream's sweet song that set
The garden-breezes all afret
With breaking waves of melody,
And at the bird's sweet minstrelsy,—
There came to him a damozel
(How fair she was no man can tell),
And said, "Fair knight, now wit thou well
That thou hast gather'd great renown
In that sad world where trees are brown
And ways are white in winter-time,
And hast in many a maker's rhyme
Been celebrate for gentilesse
And valiant doings in the press
Of armèd knights and battle-play,
In tournament and in mellay;
And over all the land is known

How, many a time, thy horn has blown
To succour maidens in distress,
And oftentimes have had redress
The needy by thy stroke of sword.
So that to him, that is the lord
Of this fair place, the fame has won
Of all that thou hast dared and done
In perfectness of chivalry;
And he, who uses well to see
Great deeds of arms and shock of spears,
Has seen no one in all these years
That may be chosen for thy peer;
And therefore has he brought thee here,
To try thee if thou canst endure
Battle and venture, forte et dure
Beyond the wont of men on earth;
Wherein if thou canst prove thy worth,
He will advance thee to his grace
And set thee surely in high place
Among his knights."

"Fair damozel,"
Said Floris, "liketh me full well
The quest, by what you say of it:
But now, I pray you, let me wit
Who is this lord, whose hest you bear,
That is so high and debonair?
And what adventure must I prove
Before that I can win his love?"

And she, "His name I may not tell;
Hereafter shalt thou know it well;
But thou shalt see him presently."

Then did she join her bended palms,
And falling down upon her knee
Among the knitted herbs and haulms,
Did softly sing a full sweet rhyme;
And in a little space of time
Was visible among the treen—
Against a trellised work of green
That at the garden's farthest end
Among the leaves did twine and blend—
A man, that walk'd among the flowers
As softly as the evening hours
Walk in the summer-haunted treen.
Full tall and stately was his mien,
And down his back the long hair lay,
Red-gold as is the early day,
Whereon a crown of light was set.
Whoever saw might ne'er forget
The sweetness of his majesty.
But in no wise could Floris see
Or win to look upon his face;
For, as he went, he turn'd aside
His visage, as it were to hide
The light of its unearthly grace
From mortal eyes.

Then Floris said,
"I pray thee of thy kindlihead,
Fair maid, that I may come to look
On this lord's visage." But she shook
Her head, and "Patience!" did she say.
"Thou must in fear and much affray
For this fair place, and for the fame
Of him that master of the same
And sovereign is, be purged and tried,
And through much venture must abide,
Ere thou mayst look upon his face
And win the guerdon of his grace,
And now the time is come to prove
Battle and hardship for his love.
Adieu, sir knight: be bold and true!"

Whereat she sped beyond his view,
And eke that figure vanishèd;
But Floris, lifting up his head,
Was ware of a strange hand that bare
A cross and stood in middle air,
And on the white plume of his crest
Did for a moment lie and rest.
Therewith great ease was given him,
And healing freedom from all dim
Sad doubts of fortune and of fate
In that great strife, that did await
His proving; and the strength of men
In him was as the strength of ten

Redoubled. Then he saw, beside
His feet, a flower-bed fair and wide
  Of roses mingled red and white,
  Full sweet of smell and fair of sight,
That in a trellised red-gold grate
Did hold a sweet and lovely state
  And spread around such wealth of balm,
  Their scent seem'd one great golden psalm
Of perfume to the praise of God.

Then Floris knelt upon the sod
  Of that fair place, and praying thrice
  Most heartily, did take advice
That up the silver-spangled grail—
That through the green did twine and trail
  Of that bright garden's goodliness—
  Some gruesome thing towards him did press,
As 'twere the roses to despoil.
So sprang he lightly from the soil,
  And from its scabbard iron-blue
  His falchion Fleurdeluceaunt drew,
And kiss'd its fair hilt cruciform;
Wherewith his heart wax'd bold and warm
  With courage past the use of men.

  Now was a loathly thing, I ween,
Made visible to him—that might
Well strike the boldest with affright.

For up the sward to him did run
A beast yet never saw the sun;
As 'twere a dog with double head,
Whose hinder parts were fashionèd
Into the likeness of a worm.
Full black and grisly was his form,
And blazing red his eyes and tongue
With raging choler, such as stung
His lusting heart to rob and tear
The flowers that in the garden were.
But as he came anigh the place
Wherein those roses all did grace
The greensward, to his troubled sight
Was visible that valiant knight,
That in whole armour of blue steel
Before the flowery shrine did kneel,
To save the emblems of Love's joy
From his most foul and rude annoy.
Wherefore at him with open mouth
The monster ran, as 'twere its drouth
And ravening lust to wreak and slake
Upon the knight. Then did he take
His sword, and with so stout a blow
Upon the beast's twin neck did throw
The edge, that with the dolorous stroke
The thread of its foul life he broke
In twain, and from the sunder'd veins
The black blood strew'd with loathly stains
The tender grass and herbs therein;

And as among the flower-stalks thin
The hideous purple gore was sprent,
From out the stain (O wonderment
And grace of Mary merciful!)
There open'd out the petals full
And lovesome of that snowy bloom
That is in all earth's sin and gloom
The fairest of all flowers to see,
The lily of white chastity.

Right glad was Floris of the sight,
And of the scent that from the white
Gold-hearted bells to him was lent;
And as he o'er the calyx bent
To breathe its fragrance, suddenly
There came a sound across the lea,
That was as if a lion roar'd;
And truly o'er the blossom'd sward
There ran to him a tawny beast,
Red-maned, that never stay'd nor ceased
To roar, until the knight could feel
His hot breath through the grated steel
That barr'd his vizor, and his claws
Sought grimly for some joint or pause
In the hard mail, where he might set
His tusks and through the rent veins let
The knight's life-blood upon the sward.
But Floris, lifting up his sword,
Him with such doughty strokes oppress'd
Upon his red and haughty crest,

That soon he made him loose his hold;
And in a while, no longer bold
  And arrogant, he would have fled,
  But that Sir Floris on his head
With the sharp edge smote such a blow,
The red blood from the rift did flow,
  And with the blood the life did pass:
  Wherefore from out the bloodied grass
There was uplift the rose of love,
With scent and blossom fair enough,
  I trow, to guerdon many a toil
  And many a battle in the coil
Of earthly woes.

  But there was yet
No time for Floris to forget
  His trouble in the red flower's sight:
  He must again in deathly fight
Be join'd for the security
Of that fair garden's purity.
  For swiftly in the lion's place
  A raging leopard came, the grace
Of those sweet roses to despoil;
And as he came, the very soil
  Quaked underneath him, such a might
  To wreak his cholerick despite
'Gainst him that was the sovereign
Of that fair place, and such disdain
  Did rage in him, that he could see
  No thing for anger. So was he

Against the roses well nigh come,
Nay, was in act to spoil their bloom,
When through his heart the deadly blade
Slid cold; and turning round, he made
At Floris with a vengeful roar,
And with his claws his thigh he tore.
A hand's-breadth in his agony.
Then down upon the grass fell he
And died; and in the tender sward,
Whereon his felon blood was pour'd,
The sign of humbleness was set,
The flower that men call violet.

Full faint was Floris with the loss
Of blood, that from the wound across
His thigh did run in many a rill,
And would have fain awhile been still
Without reproof. But no repose
Must he expect (nor one of those
That in God's battle fight on earth)
Nor pleasance of delight and mirth,
But many a dint and many a blow
Unceasing, till God will his woe
Be ended and the goal be won.

And so, as there he sat, anon,
Whilst wearily he look'd along
The fair wide path, he saw the long
Slow travel of a hideous snake,
That with much toil its way did make

Towards the roses where he stood.
So faint he was with failing blood,
He might not summon any strength
To smite its black and gruesome length
At vantage, crawling, but must wait
Until, with slow and tortuous gait,
It won to him. So weak he was,
He could not choose but let it pass
Towards the trellis; and eftsoon,
By him that lay in some half swoon,
Across the grass it slid and twined
Around the grating that confined
The flowers, its black and hideous length,
And breathed on them with all the strength
Of hate its envying soul could know
To gather in a breath, and so
To spoil their fresh and goodly bloom:
Whereat the blossoms with the gloom
Of its black coils, that shut the light
From over them, and with affright
And sickness of its loathsome breath,
Came very nigh to take their death.
For with such potent spells the air
Its venom darken'd of despair
And malice, that the lovely red
And white of their bright goodlihead
Was to a sickly pallor turn'd,
As if some loathly fever burn'd
Within their hearts: and in a while
No kiss of breeze or golden smile

Of sun had won them back to life,
So spent were they with the fell strife
Of that curs'd beast,—had not a sweep
Of wings awaken'd from the sleep
Of pain Sir Floris, and the scream
Of a great bird, whose plumes did seem
To brush his forehead, roused his sense
From the constraint of indolence.

Then sprang he up in strength renew'd;
And when he saw the serpent lewd
And hideous, that in his embrace
Did strangle all the life and grace
From out the flowers, he made at him
And with a grip so fierce and grim
Oppress'd his scaly swollen neck,
That with the dolour and the check
Of blood within his venom'd veins,
The snake must needs relax the chains
In which he held the rosery;
And in the act so mightily
He leapt at Floris, that he wound
His arms and body closely round
With scaly rings, and so uneath
Did grip the knight, that little breath
Seem'd in his body to be left;
But, summoning all strength, he reft
The horrid fetters from his breast,
And flung the worm with utterest

His might full length against the ground.

There whiles it lay in seeming swound;
And Floris, thinking it was dead,
Would have lain down his weary head
Upon the grass, to take some ease
Awhile. Then from among the trees
There came that fowl, that had awoke
Him with its passing pinions' stroke,
And with so hard a buffet drove
Him down to earth, he could nor move
Nor speak awhile, but lay as dead:
And that foul bird, with eyes of red
And vulture claws, did strive the while
At every joint and crack of mail
To wound him with its noisome beak.
At last a place it found where weak
The armour was, and with such spite
Into Sir Floris' flesh did bite,
That for the fierceness of the pain
He started up from sleep again
And with so fierce and stout a blow
The vulture strake, the steel did go
Athwart the pinions and the crest,
And riving down the armour'd breast,
Did hew the gruesome snake in twain,
In whom the life began again
To flutter. So the loathly two
With that stroke died; and with the dew

Of their foul blood, the lovely green
Of the fair sward did such a spleen
  And hate of its despiteous hue
  Conceive, that quickly sprang to view
A twine of snow-white clematis,
The sign of sweet content that is;
  And where the bird in death was cold,
  There grew the glad bright marigold,
That in its gay and golden dress
Was ever symbol of largesse,
  Since all along the meads there run
  Its mimic mirrors of the sun,
Withouten any speck or flaw.

But none of this Sir Floris saw,
  Nor how the roses lightly wore
  The freshness of their bloom once more;
So weary was he and so worn
With strife, and therewithal so torn
  With claws and beak of that fierce bird,
  He lay aswoon and saw nor heard
Or sight or sound.

Now must I tell
A wondrous thing that here befell,
  Through grace of God and Christ, His Son:
  For, while he lay aswoon, came one
In white and shining robes array'd,
And touch'd him on the lips and said,

"Arise, Sir Floris, whole of wound,
And fill thy quest!" And so was gone.
And Floris started up from ground,
And was all whole in flesh and bone
And full of heart the end to dare
Of that hard venture.

Then the air
Was of a sudden darken'd o'er
With some foul thing, that semblance wore
Of a half bird and a half worm,
Join'd in one foul and loathly form;
And with the rattle of the scales
Upon its wings—that (as huge flails
Upon the golden garnered wheat
With ceaseless rhythmic pulse do beat)
Did lash and wound the golden air—
The songs of breezes deaden'd were,
And all was dumb for much dismay:
And with its sight the lift grew gray.
And as it wheel'd on open wings,
With many blows and buffetings
It strove to daunt that valiant knight
And enforce him for sheer affright
To yield to it and let it fill
Its hungry maw at its foul will
With those fair flowers. But Floris stood
Undaunted, and with many a good
Stout stroke of point did wound the beast,

Wherewith it bled and much increased
Its ravenous rage. Then, suddenly,
He felt sharp claws about his knee,
And, looking down, no little wroth,
He saw a huge and monstrous sloth,
That with such force did hug his thighs
And gript his arms in such hard wise,
That he could scarce with bended shield
Resist him, nor with power could wield
His trusty sword; and as he strove
That monster from his grip to move,
The dragon with so fell a swoop
Against him from on high did stoop,
That down upon the ground he fell,
And in the falling did repel
The sloth from off him. Then the twain
With such foul rage at him again
Did press and buffet, that the life
Out of his breast with that fierce strife
Was well nigh chased: but, by good hap,
It chanced he fell into the lap
Of those fair blooms of various kind
That did his victory call to mind
Against the cruel beaten foes;
And, falling heavily from blows
Of beak and talons, he with such
A grinding weight did press and crush
The blossoms in the harsh and rude
Encounter, they must needs exude

From out their chalices the sweet
And precious essences that meet
To make the perfume of a flower,
And on his face and hands did shower
Their gracious balms. So sweet they were
And of a potency so rare
For salving every earthly pain,
The life began in every vein
With their pure touch to run and glow;
And soon the weary weight and woe
That lay on Floris was dispell'd.
Then, with new strength, from him he fell'd
That hideous sloth; and being free
An instant from his tyranny
And harsh oppression, to his feet
He sprang once more, and to defeat
The winged worm himself address'd,
That tore and ravish'd at his crest
With ceaseless fury; but it drew
Beyond his reaching, when it knew
Its comrade worsted, and was fain
To wait till it revived again.
But Floris, with a doubled hand,
Smote at the bear with his good brand
So fell a stroke, the sharp death slid
Through bone and sinew and forbid
Returning life to enter in
That loathly dwelling, foul with sin
And sloth;—and so the thing was dead.

And from the blood its slit veins bled
There came to life the blossoms sweet
And gold-eyed of the Marguerite,
Incoronate with petals white.

But that foul serpent with the sight
Of that good blow so sorely grieved
And fill'd with rage to be bereaved
Of its grim comrade was, it threw
All fear aside and fiercely flew
At Floris, with the armèd sting
Of its writhed tail all quivering
In act to strike, and with so strong
A swoop the dart did thrust and throng
Through dent and ring of riven mail,
The deadly point it did prevail
To bury deep in Floris' breast.
Whereat such rage the knight possess'd
That all the dolour he forgot
(Though very fierce it was, God wot,
And sad) and throwing down his blade,
With such a mighty force he laid
To drag that scorpion from his side,
The serpent's tail in twain he wried
And in such hideous wounds it rent,
That from the body coil'd and bent
With anguish it must needs divide.
Wherewith the cleft did open wide,
And such a flood therefrom did flow

Of blood upon the herbs below
That needs it seem'd the flowers must die;
And with the pain so fierce a cry
Of agony the dragon gave,
There is no heart of man so brave
And firm but he must quake at it.

And now the doom of death was writ
In heaven for that unholy beast;
And in a little while it ceased
To cry, and down upon the ground
It fell and died; and all around
The firm earth quaked. And as it died,
The blood—that wither'd far and wide
The herbs and 'mid the stalks did boil
For rage—was dried into the soil;
Wherefore there sprang from out the stain
The holy purple of vervain,
The plant that purgeth earth's desire.

Now may Sir Floris well aspire
To have that peace he needeth so,
And easance after toil and woe:
For there is none to fight with him
Of all those beasts so fell and grim;
Nor any sign of further foe
Within the garden is, I trow,
To let him from his victory;
And all around the place was free

From fear; the breezes were atune
Again with birdsongs, and the boon
Of scent within the flowers once more
Was golden, nor the heavens wore
The hue of horror and dismay:
And so he may be blithe and gay
And have sweet pleasance.

But alas!
No thought of this for Floris was.
Within his veins the venom 'gan
To curdle, and the red blood ran
With frozen slowness, as the sting
Of pain went ever gathering
Fresh fierceness through him. Very nigh
It seem'd to him he was to die.
He felt the chill of the last hour
Creep through him and the deathsweats pour
Adown his brow: such agony
Along his every vein did flee,
He could no longer up endure,
Nor hope for any aid or cure;
But down upon the earth he sank
Aswoon, with faded lips that drank
The dews of death, and, with a prayer
Half mutter'd in his last despair,
The sense forsook him. So he lay
Aswoon, poor knight, and (well-a-way!)
Most like to die.

But there was thought
In heaven for him that thus had fought
For that fair garden's sake. The love
Of the dear God that dwells above
Was mindful of him, though he knew
It not. And so to him there drew
A tender dream,—as there he lay
Smitten to death with that fierce fray,—
And fill'd his thought; and it did seem
To him, by virtue of the dream,
That over him an angel stood,
And with a sweet compassion view'd
His piteous state, and whiles did strew
Soft balms upon him, strange and new
Unto his sense,—so comforting
And sweet of scent, they seem'd to bring
To him the airs of Paradise;
And with their touch the cruel ice
Of death, that bound his every sense,
Was melted wholly; and the dense
And cruel anguish, that untied
The threads of living, did subside;
And gradually peace came back
Into his spirit, and the rack
Of pain and agony from him
Was lifted. So upon the rim
Of the sad soul a little life
Began to hover, as at strife
With Death, reluctant to forego

His late assurèd prey; and so
The breath came back by slow degrees
To the spent soul, and in great ease
Awhile he lay: and whiles he dream'd
He was in heaven, and it seem'd
He heard the golden harpings stir
The air to glory, and the choir
Of seraphim that stand around
The throne, with one sweet pulse of sound
Coörder'd, lift descant of praise
To Him that is the Lord of Days
And Ancient.

Then he seem'd to hear
A voice that murmur'd in his ear—
As 'twere a ring of broken chords
Angelic, mingled with sweet words
(So silver-clear it was)—and bade
Him open eyes: and then one laid
Soft hand upon his lids, and drew
The darkness from them. So the blue
Of heaven again was visible
To him, as 'twere some great sweet bell
Of magic flowerage in some prime
Of summer in old fairy-time:
And drinking slowly use of light
And sense of life and its delight
Back into eyes and brain, he turn'd
His gaze from where the heaven burn'd

With full sweet summer, and was ware
Of a fair champion standing there,
  Past mortal beauty. All in white
  And spotless mail was he bedight,
So clear that there is nothing fair
And goodly but was mirror'd there,
  And yet no evil thing nor sad
  Was there. Upon his helm he had
A fair gold cross, and on his shield
The semblance of a lamb did wield
  A fair gold cross. Upon his crest
  The snows of a fair plume did rest
And waved; and eke his pennoncel
Was white as is the new-blown bell
  Of that fair flower that loves the wind,
  And round his dexter arm was twined
A snow of silk. Full glorious
The splendour of his harness was,
  And wonder-lovely to behold:
  But as white silver and red gold
Are pale beside the diamond,
So was his visage far beyond
  His arms in glory and delight
  Of beauty. There was such a might
Of stainless virtue and of all
Perfection pictured, and withal
  So wondrous tender in aspèct
  He was, it seem'd as if the Elect
Of Christ on earth in him did live;

That, with glad eyes, men might arrive,
Beholding him, to know that love
And gentilesse of God and prove
In him the sweetness of that grace
That shinèd ever in Christ's face
On earth.

And so in very deed
It seem'd to Floris that the need
Of earth was over, and his soul
Was won thereto where life is whole—
Withouten any stress or dole—
At last in joyance, and his eyes
Did view, in robes of Paradise,
That tender angel of the Lord,
That into men's sore bosoms pour'd
Sweet balms and comfort, being set
To temper justice and the fret
Of life with love most pitiful.
And whilst he thus did gaze his full
Upon the radiance of that wight,
The soft and undefiled delight,
That in his eyes did hold full sway,
So purged all Floris' awe away
And eke such boldness to him gave
That he was fain of him to crave
His name.

Then, "I am Galahad,
Christ's knight," he said.

Whereat full glad
Was Floris, and all reverently
Unto the earth he bent his knee
Before the knight, and (an he list)
Would fain the broider'd hem have kiss'd
Of his white robe; but Galahad
Did raise him quickly up and bade
Him henceforth kneel to God alone,
That on the height of Heaven's throne
Is for man's soul the only one
Of worship, save sweet Christ, His Son,
And Mary mother pitiful;
And henceforth were no kings that rule
So blest as Floris now should be,
Since that with such high constancy
And noble faith he had withstood
The shock of that unholy brood,
And in fair fight had vanquish'd them.
Wherefore for crown and diadem
Of triumph, on the greensward freed
From those foul beasts that there did bleed
Their life away beneath his blade,
In goodly order were array'd
For him those pleasant blooms and fair,
That not alone so debonair
And blithe of aspect were, but eke
Had virtues—more than one might speak
In wearing of a summer's day—
For purging fleshly lusts away

And cleansing from his heart—who wore
Their beauty fairly—all the sore
  Sad doubts and weariness of earth,
  So that with an immortal mirth
And constant faith his soul was glad,
And evermore sweet peace he had
  In love of God and eke of Christ,
  The which against all ills sufficed
Of mortal life. And as he spoke
From the slight stems those flowers he broke
  That 'midst the herbage did entreat
  The eye with blossom very sweet
And gracious; and (O wonderment!)
Being in his hand conjoin'd, they blent
  Their essences in such rare wise,
  It seem'd from each sweet bell did rise
A sweeter perfume, and more bright
Their semblance grew, as 'twere some might
  Of amity was moved in them—
  Being so join'd into one stem—
To heighten each one's loveliness
With all its fellows did possess
  Of blithe and sweet. And therewithal,
  When from the grass those flow'rets all
Were gather'd, to Sir Floris came
That noblest knight, and in Christ's name,
  With fairest look and friendliest speech,
  Him of his kindness did beseech
That he from him those blooms would take
And breathe their fragrance.

Scarce awake
From swoon was Floris yet; and so
He took them with dull hands and slow,
And did address himself to scent
Their breath, as one half indolent
With sleep; but when the gracious smell
Was won to him, that from each bell
Did float and hovering was blent
Into some wondrous ravishment
Of sweets,—there smote him such a sense
Of gladsome ease and recompense
Of all his labours, that the dull
Gross drowsiness, that did annul
The soul within the man, forsook
Him wholly; and withal he took
Such gladness, that in every vein
The life seem'd blithely born again;
And through his frame so fresh a flood
Of ardour pour'd, it seem'd the blood—
That in men's pulses sluggishly
Does throb and flutter—was made free
From earthly baseness and was turn'd
To heavenly ichor. For there burn'd
Within him such a fire of hope,
He felt his soul no more did grope
Within the dreary dusk of earth,
But on the wings of a new birth
Towards the highest heaven did soar.
Nor was there for him any more

A thought of weariness or woe;
But from the earth he rose, and so
Was ready for all venturing
And all the quest of holy thing
God might appoint him.

Then that knight,
That was apparell'd all in white,—
Most brightly smiling at the new
Glad ardour that did straight ensue
In Floris with those blossoms' scent,
And at the holy joy that brent
Upon the dial of his face,—
Within his arms did him embrace
And kiss'd him very lovingly.
Then in this wise to him spake he,
With grave sweet speech.

"Beyond the brine,
Where in the Orient first the sign
Of dawn upon the sky is set,—
In that sweet clime where men forget
The winter, and the summer lies
So lovingly upon the skies,
That of a truth the very night
Is lucent and the cruel spite
Of darkness never wholly hides
The flowers, but aye some light abides,
Wherefore men call it morning-land,—

A fair and stately house doth stand,
Wherein, by help of God His grace,
Unto my lot it fell to place
That holy token of the Lord,
That He to mortals did afford
Awhile on earth to look upon
For consolation; but anon,
Moved to slow anger by their sin
And stubborn wickedness, within
His mystery He did withdraw
The blessèd thing: but yet the law
Of that sad doom He temperèd—
Of His great grace and kindlihead—
With mercy. For it was ordain'd
That if one kept himself unstain'd
And pure from every lust and sin,
A virgin, he should surely win
And come to taste of that sweet food
Of the Redeemer's flesh and blood.
And unto me such grace was given
That of all champions that have striven
I have been chosen from the rest
For winning of the Holy Quest;
Since that, as in the Writ we read,
God of the humblest may indeed
Be pleased to make His instrument,
Even unto me that joy was sent,
Surpassing all that of old time
Is told for us in minstrel's rhyme

Of Heaven's mercy: and, God wot,
Were passèd o'er Sir Lancelot
And sweet Sir Tristram, that again
The world shall never of those twain
Behold the like, such debonair
And perfect gentle knights they were.

"Wherefore to God it seemèd fit
That a fair dwelling over it
Should for its safe keeping be built:
And that no breath of sin or guilt
Might there approach, there was enroll'd
A band of knights, in whom the gold
Of virtue had been smelted out
And purified from sin and doubt
By toil and venture perilous.
And in that high and holy house
In goodly fellowship they dwell,
Until to God it seemeth well—
For long good service done—to call
One of the brethren from the thrall
Of earthly life, and with His blest
In Paradise to give him rest.
Wherefore, when one is call'd away,
It is ordain'd that from the grey
Of the sad world another knight—
To fill his place who, benedight,
Has won the guerdon of his strife—
Be chosen out, to cast off life

And with much labour and much pain
Be purified from earthly stain
  And tried with woe. If he endure
  And from the furnace come out pure
Of sin and lusting, he shall stand
For the dead brother in the band
  Angelical, and shall be set
  With those that, pure of earthly fret,
Do guard the shrine miraculous.

" In such a wise enrollèd was
  Sir Percivale; and Lohengrin
  By like adventuring did win
Among the holy knights to sit;
And many more of whom ye wit.
  And lately it the Lord hath pleased
  That yet another should be eased
Of his long service and preferr'd
Among the angels to be heard
  And scent the breath of heaven's rosen.
  And in his stead hast thou been chosen
In much hard strife to be assay'd
And for Christ's service fitting made.
  Wherefore this venture has been given
  To thee, in which thou now hast striven
So wonder-well, that thou mightst win
To purge thyself of earthly sin.
  And having in good sooth prevail'd
  Against all dangers that assail'd

Thee and this garden's purity,
There is great bliss ordain'd for thee;
  For that thy name shall be enroll'd
  Among those knights in ward that hold
The blessed Grail; and thou with me
Beyond the billows of the sea
  Shalt come to where that house is fair
  Withouten any pain or care,
And shalt awhile taste heaven's bliss,
And on thy mouth shalt have the kiss
  Of Christ the Lord, that doth assoil
  All weariness of earthly toil
And gives unto all sorrows peace
Undying."

So the strain did cease
  Of his sweet speaking, and awhile
  The very sweetness of his smile
Did hinder Floris from reply:
And eke the thought of bliss so nigh
  His lips and all the ravishment
  Of promise that he did prevent
In his imagining and lack
Of words for utterance held back
  His tongue from speaking anything.
  But Galahad for answering
Stay'd not, but, with a doubled grace
Of sweet assurance in his face,
  Began to say, in very deed,

That presently there was great need
They should withouten more delay
Towards the dawning take their way,
For many a mile the voyage was
And for great distance tedious.

Then Floris said to him, "Fair knight,
That in whole armour of pure white
Dost serve God in all chastity,
I pri'thee, lightly show to me
How we may gain that distant land
That by the rising sun is scann'd,—
Since neither boat is here nor had?"

Whereat no word spake Galahad,
But with his hand the sign he made,
That makes all evil things afraid
And compasses all good about
With armour against sin and doubt;
And straightway with the holy sign
A white cross in the air did shine
A second, as for answering;
And then the stream's soft murmuring
Grew louder to the sweep of waves
Along the reed-crests and the glaives
Of rushes, and its silver thread
Into a river's mightihead
Was stretch'd; and on the stream did float
The silver wonder of a boat,

Gold-keel'd and fair with silken sails,
Such boat as, in old Eastern tales,
The genii bring at the command
Of some enchanter's magic wand.
And on the prow of cymophane—
Translucent as the pearly wane
Of that fair star that rules the night,
With an internal glory bright—
The milk-white holy bird did sit
And spread soft pinions over it,
That flutter'd with desire of flight.

Therein stepp'd Galahad, Christ's knight;
And after him did Floris come
At beckoning, wholly dazed and dumb
With wonders of that wondrous time.
And as into the stern did climb
The valiant knight, the soft sweet wind
That 'mid the blossom'd trees was twined,
Ceased from its disport in the flowers
And leafage of those magic bowers,
And with such strong yet gentle stress
Within the silken sails did press
Towards the dawning, that the keel
Slid through the waters blue as steel
As swiftly as the morning sun
Shears through the mists when night is done
And day is golden in the sky.
And as it through the lymph did fly

Of that enchanted rivulet,
The golden keel to song did fret
The thronging currents, and the ring
Of murmurous water-notes did sing
And ripple in the diamond deeps,
Such music as the West wind sweeps
From out the harps of Fairyland,
When elves are met on some sweet strand
Of Broceliaund or Lyonesse,
For revel and for wantonness.

On all sides round them as they went
The dim grey woods were sad and spent
With weariness of winter-time,
And in the fields the rugged rime
Held all things in the sleep of death,
Stern white, and void of living breath;
And with the weary weight of snow
The laden boughs were bent and low.
But in their sails a breath there blew
Of April zephyrs, and there drew
Unto their course a summer cloud
With scents of flowers and birdsongs strow'd;
And echoings of July woods—
When in the green the bluebell broods—
Were thick and sweet about their way,
And ever round the boat's prow lay
The scent of grass-swaths newly mown;
And wildflowers in gold grain and brown

Waved in the sweet dream-haunted air.

So went they,—while the night was bare
Of sound or breath to break the sleep
Of winter,—through the woodlands deep,
And past the well-remember'd plains
And towns and meadows, where the lanes
And streets were hush'd with winter-time,—
And saw no creature on the rime,
Save some stray sheep shut out from fold
Or wolf, that from his forest hold
Was by hard hunger forced to seek
Scant prey upon the moorlands bleak.

So ever without cease they sped
Above that swift sweet river's bed;
And truly, as the golden morn
From out the dim grey mists was born
And all things 'gan to wake from sleep,
They heard the silver rush and sweep
Of waves upon a pebbled shore;
And gliding past the meadows frore,
They came to where the river's tide
Was fleck'd with foam, and far and wide
The main, as far as eye could see,
Slept in a sweet serenity.

Far out to seaward fled their boat,
Across the wild white flowers that float

And blossom on the azure leas;
And swiftly as the culver flees
  Among the trees with shadow twined,
  They left the frozen fields behind,
And saw the spangled foam divide
The firmament on every side.

  The golden calm of summer seas
  Was there, and eke the July breeze
That waves upon the silver foam,
When in the azure heaven's dome
  The sign of summer-prime is set:
  And still no winds opposed they met,
Nor break of billows in their way;
But through the dancing ripples' play
  The shallop sped towards the dawn,
  As by some starry influence drawn
Over the ridges of the main
Unstirr'd and clear. And still the rain
  Of blossoms fell about the stem,
  And still sweet odours breathed on them
Of rose and jasmine, and the song
Of birds about the sail was strong.

  So over silver seas they went,
  And heaven, wide-eyed for wonderment,
Hung o'er them open blue the while,
As though all nature were asmile
  To see the lovely way they made:

And ever round the sharp keel play'd
The fretted lacework of the foam,
And through the jewell'd deeps did roam
Great golden fish, and corals red
Waved in the dim sweet goodlihead
Of that clear blue; and through the wave
The shells of many a rich cave
Were visible, wherein the sea
Held in a sweet security
Treasures of pearl and lovely gold,
That eye of man might ne'er behold
Until the main should leave its bed;
And over all the deeps was shed
A glancing play of emerald light,
So that the unembarrass'd sight
Pierced through the cool sweet mystery
Of folded billows, and the eye
Was free in shadows jewel-clear.
Nor was there anything of fear
For them in lapse of hyaline
Or silver breakers of the brine;
Nor in the crystals of the air
Was anything but blithe and fair,
Sweet winds and glitter of fair birds,
Whose song was sweeter than sweet words
Between the pauses of a kiss,
When lovers meet in equal bliss.

So many a day they sail'd and long,

Lull'd by the breezes' flower-sweet song
And pipe of jewel-birds that went
Above them, fair to ravishment;
Until, one morn, athwart the lift
Of blue was visible a rift
Of purple mountain; and a spire
Of amethyst rose ever higher
Into the sapphire firmament.
And drawing nigh, they saw where blent
Its silver-currents with the blue
Of that bright ocean, blithe to view,
A fair clear river that outpour'd
Its waters 'twixt soft green of sward
And slope of flower-besprinkled banks,
Where rushes stood in arching ranks,
Tipt with a jewel of fair flower
As blue as is the morning hour,
When in the golden prime of May
The sweet dawn blends into the day.

The swift keel slid between the rows
Of ripples,—as a steed that knows
The road of some familiar place,—
And past the bubbled foamy race
Of eddies, through the sapphire cleft
Of that bright pass, and quickly left
The billows of the sea behind,
As on that goodly stream the wind
Did urge it far into the land.

Surely was never kingdom spann'd
On earth by river such as this,
Where ever some enchanted bliss
Ran in the ripples, and the stream
With liquid gold and pearl did seem
To glitter. There is nought more fair
Beneath the regions of the air
Than this same river; nor in all
Birdnotes is aught more musical
Than the delight of its clear flow
Across the pebbles, soft and low.
And in the banks were wondrous things,
All lovely creatures that bear wings;
And every precious thing of green,
And flower of gold and jewell'd sheen,
Was there in such a perfect shape,
Its essence must full needs escape
The grasp of my poor minstrelsy.
The very grass was fair to see
Beyond the fairest flower of earth;
For with the gold of some new birth
It burnt, and was aflame with bright
Sweet gladness. Very flames of light
The flowers seem'd, zaffiran and blue
And crystal-clear with wonder-dew.
It seem'd their scent so heavenly was,
That into music it must pass
And soar into a perfumed song.

And as the boat was borne along
The golden ripples, in its speed
Dividing many a woven weed,
That with its many-colour'd mesh
Of trailing leaves and flowers did stretch
And wave upon the waters bright,—
Sir Floris, with what prayers he might,
That gracious Galahad besought
That from his lips he might be taught
What was that river and that realm,
That all earth's sweets did hide and whelm
In one etern forgetfulness,
And made all joys that men possess
Seem poor and naught with the delight
Of its exceeding lovely might.
And without pausing, Galahad
To him made answer fair and glad.

" Fair knight, this land through which we pass,
About the city of Sarras
Doth lie; and all the golden plain
Beyond thy vision, for demesne—
By grace and favour of high Heaven—
Unto the Holy Town was given,
Where lies in hold the blessed Grail.—

" Before from Paradise did fail
Adam and Eva for their sin,
These happy fields and glades within

The golden gates of Eden were,
Wherein was nothing but was fair:
And this same river of those four
Was one, that of old times did pour
Blithe waters over all the plain,
When life was young and free from stain,
And angels walk'd upon the earth.
And (for their flow) came never dearth
Of kindly fruits nor any drought
Of summer-time the place about;
Nor for the warmth of their clear flood
Might winter nip the flowery bud
Of the perpetual spring, that rain'd
Fresh blossoms there; nor ever waned
The balms of summer in the air,
But evermore the place was fair
With all May-sweets and summer-spells.
And still,—although the cloister'd dells
Of the lost garden no more stand
Upon the peace of the fair land,—
Around its precincts, as of old,
A silver stream with sands of gold
Flows ever, which no foot of man,
Or eye, without Christ's leave, can span;
Of all the four the only one
That still with murmurous waves doth run
In the old channel. Very fair
Its marges are with all things rare;
And over all the land is strown

Thick bdellium and the onyx-stone."

And many another wondrous thing
Unto Sir Floris, listening,
Spake Galahad of that fair land,
That eye of man hath never scann'd,
Save he have won to Christ His grace.
And as he spoke, came on apace
The tender day, and gilded all
The ripples; and the golden ball
Of the sweet sun rose high in heaven;
And unto every thing was given
New ravishment and new delight
Of very waking. Fairer sight
Saw mortal never (nor indeed
So fair within our earthly need
Is compass'd) than the morning hour
That open'd into full sweet flower
With many a rosy flush and rain
Of golden sunlight over plain
And mead, and many a tender shade
Kiss'd into warmth—that in green glade
Lay waiting for the frolic light—
And changed to fleecy gold the white
Of dawn-clouds over hill and wold.
It was so gracious to behold
The day in that sweet Paradise,
There is no man with mortal eyes
Could drink its beauty wholly in,

For dust of care and mirk of sin
That hide much loveliness from men.

And Floris ever and again
Was dumb with awe of much delight
And wonderment; as with swift flight
The boat sped through the flowers that shone
With blazon'd gold and blue upon
That magic river of a dream,
He sat and stored the influence
Of the lush balms within his sense,
And watch'd the ripples all agleam
With jewels, and the constant smile
Of the sweet sunlight. And the while
The songs of birds co-ordinate
And zephyrs with a peace so great
And sweet upon his soul did seize,
And whiles his spirit had such ease
In that sweet speech of Galahad,
He needs forgot that aught of sad
Or dreary in this life is set,
Or weariness of earthly fret;
And did, without a backward glance,
Yield up himself into the trance
Of that new joy.

So sped they on
Towards the orient: and anon,—
Whenas the noon was borne along

The midmost heaven, to the song
Triumphal of the joyous choir
Of birds and breezes, ever higher
Soaring in one sweet antiphon,—
There rose in the sweet sky—upon
The fair broad hem of woven gold,
That marged with many a fleecy fold
The sapphire-chaliced firmament—
A glitter of tall spires, that brent
With an unearthly radiance;
And many a jewel-colour'd lance
Of belfry pierced the golden air
On the horizon: and there bare
The wind to them a strain of song
Ineffable, the stream along—
Faint for great distance—that for joy
And triumph over earth's annoy
With such a rapturous sweetness smote
On Floris, he could neither note
The kingdom's varied loveliness
Nor the sweet antiphonal stress
Of winds and birds and rivulet,
But it alone could hear, nor let
Himself from striving up to it;
For with its melody was knit
About his soul an influence
So strong, it seem'd his every sense
Must press towards it. And at last,
For ecstasy he would have cast

Himself headlong into the stream,
That therewithal, as he did deem,
He might the swiftlier win toward
That wondrous singing and the ward
Of that bright town miraculous.
But Galahad the good knight was
Mindful of him, and by his arm
Withholding him therefrom, did charm
His soul with such sweet words, that he
Must for a while contented be
To wait the progress of the boat,
That very speedily did float,
God wot, across the ripples' race,
To where the turrets of the place
Were clear.

And so they came at last
To where the running river pass'd
From the long lapse of pleasant wood
And meadow with enchantments strew'd
Of flowers and sun-gold, and were ware
Of the bright town that all the air
With towers and pinnacles did fill,
Set on the slope of a soft hill,
That in the sun wore one clear hue
Of purple blending into blue,
Most like a great sweet amethyst.

And now the gunwale softly kiss'd

The golden shore; and, thick with gem
And coral, round the entering stem
Was wrinkled up the glittering sand.
Then Galahad upon the strand
Stepp'd lightly out; and as his feet
Upon the grainèd gold did meet
Of the rich shingle, there was borne
To them the noise of a blown horn,
That was as if a warder blew
To challenge, from some tower of view
Within the amber-gated town;
Wherefrom to them it floated down
And fill'd the air with echoings
So sweet, there is no bird that sings
Could find such music in his throat
Melodious. And as the note
Of welcome swell'd and waned around
The hollows of the hills,—unwound
From his mail'd breast Sir Galahad
A silver horn he thereon had
In its white baldrick, and therein
Breathing, its hollow bell did win
Unto so sweet an answering blast,
It seem'd to Floris that at last
He heard the trumps angelical.
Then at the silver clarion's call
The beryl gates were open'd wide
Of the fair town; and on the side
Of the soft hill there was to them

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Made visible—upon the hem
Of woven grass with blue-bells strew'd
And asphodels—a multitude
Of holy knights, that down the sward
In a bright painted pageant pour'd,
With many a waving pennoncel
Of gold and azure; and the swell
Of clarions, co-ordinate
To mystic harmonies, did wait,
With cadences most grave and sweet,
Upon the rhythm of their feet.
So goodly were they of aspèct
And in such pictured raiment deck'd
Of say and samite, there is none,
Minstrel or bard, beneath the sun,
That could have sung of their array
As it befits to sing it,—nay,
Not even he who many a day
In Fäerie enchanted lay
And learnt full many a year and long
The cadences of elfin song,
True Thomas; nor that couthliest wight
In gramarye, that Merlin hight.

Full bright their arms and lucent were
And of a sheen so wonder-fair,
The sun seem'd of a nobler kind
To glitter, when his beamings shined
Upon the silver-mirror'd mail.

And at the sight of them did fail
Sir Floris' courage, that till now
Had never seen thing high enow
To give him pause; for there did come
So strange a fear on him, that dumb
And cold he grew, and haply might
Have swoon'd away for sheer affright
Of wonder and great reverence
That lay upon his every sense.
Indeed, awhile the blood did leave
Its courses and great awe did weave
Strange terrors in him; and with pain
And fear despiteous, he was fain
To hide his visage from the might
Of that much brightness.

Then that knight
Sir Galahad laid hands on him,
And quickly freed him from the grim
Sad grasp of that unreal fear,
And bade him that of right good cheer
He should become, for knighthood's sake,
And for his honour comfort take
And new stout heart; for shame it was
And despite, one so valorous
And bold in arms should faint and fail,
Where he most surely should prevail,
'Midst those that now his comrades were
And fellow-knights: and with much fair

Discourse did win him from affright.
So that at last he dared the sight
Of those fair knights, and saw they gazed
Right courteously on him and praised
His hard-won victory. So he took
New heart, and with assurèd look
Leapt out upon the jewell'd sand:
And as the twain were come to land,
From those knights all so sweet a sound
Of songful greeting did resound,
The blue of heaven could never tire
Of answering; and from many a lyre
And cithern the alternate joy
Of harpings join'd in sweet alloy
Its silver with that golden song.

So Floris was among that throng
Of knights received, with many a kiss
And glad embracement: nor, I wis,
Fail'd Galahad that he should name
Each knight that to the greeting came.
To him was Titurel made known,
And Percivale, to whom was shown—
With Bors—such grace of God most high,
By reason of much purity,
That they alone with Galahad
Upon the earthly questing had
The blessed vision of the Grail:
Nor Lohengrin to him did fail;

And many another noble knight
Of fabled prowess and approved
In gentilesse and all Christ loved,
Did there rejoice him with his sight.

So, for the meed of his good fight,
Into the wonder-town they bare
Sir Floris,—wherein many a rare
Delight to him appointed was.

Bright was the place and glorious
With glory of the abiding love
Of God and Christ, that is above
All splendours marvellous and fair;
And luminous its ramparts were
With pearls and rubies constellate
And diamonds into such state
And harmony as, save in heaven,
Unto no place or thing is given
To wear or look on: such a blaze
Of joy was there, without amaze;
For all was gracious and sweet
With Christ His grace. The very feet
That fell upon the jewell'd stones
Compell'd them to such silver tones
Of music, and the ruffled air
Was stirr'd to harmonies so fair,
And, for mere passage through the place,
Was won to such a subtle grace

Of perfume, that therein to be
And move was one long ecstasy:
And there the dole of earth and stress
Of hope unfill'd and weariness
Was purged, and life was one delight
Of perfect function, by the might
Unfailing of the doubtless soul;
And every act and thought was whole
In strifeless àccord. If one spoke,
The hinder'd voice no longer broke
Into harsh sadness, spent and wried
With weary effort, but did glide
Into an unconstrain'd consent
Of harmony and ravishment
Unstressful; and the every geste
Was with like subtle grace possess'd,
And every faculty was cast
In symmetry, what time one pass'd
The portals of the place, and heard
The echoes of his feet that stirr'd
The holy quiet.

So the spell
Of the charm'd place on Floris fell
Transfiguringly, as the wide
Gold-trellised leaves on either side
Swung back for him: there came a change
Upon his senses, and a strange
Sweet ease of life, as if the soul,

Way-worn and rusted with the dole
And fret of earth, were softly riven
From him, and in its stead were given
To him a new and perfect one,
In a whole body as the sun
Lucent, and worthy for the seat
Of the fair spirit.

Up the street
Gold-paven and with chrysolite
And jacinth marged, they brought the knight,
Past many a goodly hostelry
And many a dwelling fair to see,
Unto a portal sculptured all
With handiwork angelical,
In stories of the love of Christ,
And all the times it hath sufficed
To win sad living to much ease;—
And passing through with harmonies
Of choral song, they came unto
A vaulted courtyard, stretching through
A cloister'd vista to fair halls
Of alabaster, where the walls
With many a colour'd crystal shone
Of jewell'd casement; and thereon
The questing of the Holy Grail,
In many a wonder-lovely tale,
Was with bright gold and wonderment
Of colour'd jewel-fretwork blent

To harmony, depicturèd.
And there, in truth, Sir Floris read,—
  Beside much other venturing,
  And many another goodly thing
Achieved in service of the Lord,—
The fight that he with his good sword
  Had in the wonder-garden fought.
  Nor, therewithal, was missing aught
Of all that did that night befall
Unto him: but upon the wall
  Was in bright colours pictured forth
  The tale of all his knightly worth
And service.

Little strange it is
If much he wonder'd was at this,
  And could for wonder scarce believe
  His eyes, that any should achieve
So vast a work and of such grace
And splendour in so scant a space
  Of time. But Lohengrin besought
  Him very fairly that of nought
He saw he should be wonderèd,
Nor any venture have in dread;
  Since that to that high Lord, that there
  Did reign, all wonders easy were
And wonderless; nor of His grace
Was anything in all that place
  That might avail for any fear

Or doubt, but rather to give cheer
And love and confidence was fit,
So sweet a peace did dwell in it
Of amity and holiness.

Then with slow feet they did address
Their further steps,—by a long aisle
Of cloister'd pearl, wherethrough the smile
Of sunlight filter'd lingeringly
And lay in one sweet soften'd sea
Of gold upon the silver mail,—
Towards the temple of the Grail.
And in a vestibule, that was
Thereto adjacent, did they pause
And in fair garments clad the knight,
With silver radiant and white.
And then into an armoury
They led him, very fair to see
With noble weapons, all arow
Against the wainscot. There a snow
Of plumes upon his crest they bound,
And from the swords that hung around
A goodly blade was given him,
That to the sound of many a hymn
And many a golden litany,
Had in the glorious armoury
Of highest heaven forgèd been:
So trenchant was it and so keen,—
Being in celestial fires assay'd

And in strange dews of heaven made
Attemper'd,—there might none withstand
The thunderstroke of that good brand,
Except his bosom armour'd were
With equal virtue. Then the fair
Graven presentment of a dove
With eyes of gold was set above
His helm,—most like the fowl that brought
Him to the garden where he wrought
Such deeds of arms; and on the field
Cœrulean of his virgin shield
There was a like resemblant set,
That men might know him, when they met
In sharp sword-play or battle-throng.

Then, with a ripple of sweet song,
The golden doors were backward roll'd,
That in sweet mystery did fold
The holy place; and Floris came
Into a hall, where with a flame
Of jewell'd light the air was gilt;
And therewithin the walls were built
Of that clear sapphire jewelry
That can in nowise elsewhere be
Save for the pavement of the sky
And for the throne of God most high.
And under foot the floor was bright
With one clear topaz, as the light
Of the sweet sun in hue. Above

There was y-sprad a flower-bell roof
Of that sweet colour of deep blue
One in the spring may chance to view,
When in the golden-threaded moss
The deep wood-dells are odorous
With violets and the cluster'd bells
Of bee-loved hyacinths, or else
The deep clear colours pers and inde
Of wild-flowers in the gold corn twined
With many a tassel of bright blue,
When summer in the skies is new.—
And in the bell were golden lights,
Most like the tender eye-delights
Of the gold kingcups in the green,
That in quaint wise were set between
The fretted azure of the dome.
And therethorough did meteors roam,
As 'twere in truth the very heaven,
And the sweet symbols of the seven
Great angels that do rule the skies
Were therein jewell'd. In such wise
The varied lights were mixt and blent
With those that heavenward were sent
From walls and pavement,—all the air
Was with that lightsomeness most fair
And tender fill'd, that in the May
Is weft about the sweet young day,
When whiles it seems the sky is dight
With one great primrose of soft light,

Most pure and tender. On the ground
There stood fair statues all around,
  Deep-set in woven flowers and green
  Of lavish leafage, stretch'd between
Tall carven pillars of that bright
Jewel that chrysoberyl hight,
  And many another precious stone.
  Nor there were images alone
Of holy things, as one might deem;
But eke full many a lovely dream
  Of tender love and constancy
  Was in clear gold and ivory
With loving hand made manifest.
For there was nothing there confess'd
  Of sin or wantonness in love,—
  As ancient doctors teach, that prove
All pleasant things that are, to be
Unloved of God. And verily
Sir Floris wonder'd there to see
  The histories that makers tell
  Of Parisate and Floridelle,
The tale of Tristan and Ysolde,
  Of Lancelot and Guenevere,
And many another tale of old,
  That men on earth do dully lere
That we should count accurst and ill:
But there depictured were they still,
  In very piteous fashion told;
  And on the wall in words of gold

Was writ this legend, " *Quiconque aime*
Complait a Dieu en pechié mesme."

And while Sir Floris stood and gazed
Upon the statues,—much amazed
At all that he did hear and see
Within the temple,—suddenly
There was a fluted singing heard,
As of some wonder-lovely bird.
And then one took him by the hand,
And led him where a gold screen spann'd
The topaz paved work of the floor.

Then was he ware of a high door,
That with much wonderwork of gold
And unknown metals was enscroll'd
In many a trellis of fair flowers
And fronds enough fair for the bowers
Of Paradise; and in the leaves
There sat a bird, that was as sheaves
Of ripen'd corn in hue, and sang—
That therewithal the temple rang—
Of unknown glories of the May,
Therein where life is one long day
Of spring and never change is there,
Nor any sadness in the air.
And as he sang, the golden gate
Swung open slowly, and the great
Sweet hollow of a pure white pearl

Lay clear behind that golden merle,
Into a chamber fashionèd.

There was an altar built and spread
With tapestry of silver white,
Woven with lilies; and thereon
Was set a chalice, out of one
Great emerald moulded,—with samite,
The colour of the heart's best blood,
Enshrouded; and thereover stood
A great white cross and fill'd the air
With living radiance, as it were
A sculptured work of very light.

Then with the wonder of the sight
Was Floris fill'd; and for great awe
And reverence of all he saw
Within the pearl, straightway he fell
Upon his knees. But Titurel
With counsel very fair and wise
Required of him that he should rise
From off the ground and without fear
Unto the altar should draw near
And for an offering thereon
Should lay those blossoms he had won
In parlous fight and much duresse,
That of their blended goodliness
And eke their perfume's ravishment,
There might a sacrifice be sent,

To God and Christ acceptable.

And now a wondrous thing befell,
(God grant us all the like to see);
For as Sir Floris reverently
Upon the silver cloth did lay
The holy flowers (that, sooth to say,
Were bright of bloom and sweet of scent,
Unfaded, as when first they sprent
The greensward) and withdrawing thence
A little space, in reverence
The issue did await,—there came
A hand all shapen out of flame,
And from the emerald of the cup
The crimson samite lifted up;
And as this thing was done, there fell—
As 'twere from out the midmost bell—
A light that through the emerald sped
And mingled with the holy bread;
And with the light, came one that pass'd
Thought-swift athwart the air and cast
Himself into the cup,—as 'twere
The angel of a child,—most fair
And awful. Wherewithal thereout
There went a fire the place about,
And fill'd the temple with its breath,
Wherein was neither hurt nor death;
But of its contact there were given
To Floris very balms of heaven

For consecration; and to eat
There was vouchsafed him food so sweet
And goodly such as no man knows.

Then from the chaliced gem there rose
The semblance of a face, that was
With such a splendour glorious
And awful—and withal as mild
And tender as a little child—
There is no bard can sing of it
As it befitteth, save he sit
(And hardly then) among the choirs,
That to the throb of golden lyres
Do praise God ever night and day
With music such as no man may.—
There is but one of woman born
By whom such aspect can be worn
Of perfect love and perfect awe
Commingled.

And when Floris saw
The glory of the eyes, and knew
The holy love, that like a dew
From out their radiant deeps was shed
Upon his soul,—for very dread
Of ravishment he could not gaze
Upon their light, but with amaze
And wonderment of joy was fain
Down to the earth to bend again

His face: but ere he ceased to see
The vision, of a surety
  It was made known to him (although
  He wist not how he came to know)
That heavenly face no other's was
Than that same Lord's who erst did pass
  Before his vision in the green
  Of the fair garden, all beseen
With glittering hair.

Then as he knelt,
Unseeing, suddenly he felt
  Upon his mouth a burning kiss,
  That with such sharp unearthly bliss
His soul did kindle into flame
Of ravishment, the wayworn frame
  Could not for frailty sustain
  The rapturous ecstatic pain
Of that strange joyance, nor the spright
Embodied, 'gainst the fierce delight
  Endure of that unearthly boon;
  And so for bliss he fell aswoon,
And heard therein a great sweet voice,
That bade him fear not, but rejoice,
  For Christ the Lord his lips had kiss'd;
  And therewithal the Eucharist
Was borne into his mouth, with sound
Of harps angelic all around
  Soft-smitten; nor therefore did break

His charmèd sleep.

Then did one speak
To him as in the trance he lay,
And with a murmurous voice did say,
That for the service of that Lord,
To whom was sacred now his sword,
It was ordain'd that for a space
He should return unto his place
Upon the earth, and in all things
That life on earth to mortals brings,
Should for his Master's honour strive,
Until the order'd time arrive
When God should set him free from soil
And weariness of earthly toil.
And there was given him a sign
When it should please the Lord Divine
To make His will beneficent
Patent to him,—there should be sent,
Twice more before the period set
For his release from earthly fret,
To him the self-same silver dove,
The holy symbol of the love
Of Christ and of His chivalry.
And it was told him that when he
Of the white messenger had wit,
He should leave all and follow it:
For when it should of him be seen
Anew, as it of late had been,

He should be ware that God had need
Of him elsewhere—in very deed—
Upon the earth, and will'd essay
His service yet within the way
Of living: but what time he heard
The thrice-said summons, and the bird
Miraculous unto him came
A third time, in the holy name,—
He should, in following, be freed
From toil and labour and the need
And weariness of day and night,
And from the knowledge and the sight
Of men be ravish'd, to abide
In that fair town beatified,
And serve the Grail, till it seem'd fit
Unto the Lord that he should sit
Among the blest in Paradise
And praise Him ever.

In this wise
It seem'd to Floris that one spoke
To him with soft sweet speech, that broke
His slumber not, as he did lie
In that long swoon; and, suddenly,
The murmur of the speech forsook
His hearing wholly; nor with look
Or ears awhile was anything
Apparent to him, that could bring
The wonders of the holy town

Back to his senses ; but the brown
And fleecy-plumaged wings of sleep
Inclosed him wholly. In a deep
And senseless dream awhile he lay,
Until it seem'd to him the gray
Of night that compass'd him about
Was by a radiance from without
Transmicate, and the fluted song
Of the gold merle again was strong
Upon his hearing. Then the dim
Gray webs of slumber were from him
Unfolded slowly, and there burst
A golden light on him. At first
The drowsy cumber on his eyes
Allow'd him not to recognize
The place wherein he was, nor know
Wherefrom the amber-colour'd glow
Of light was borne : but speedily
He was aware that he did lie
Upon his bed, and through the fold
Of silken tapestries the gold
Of the young sun upon his face
Was shed ; and past the window-space,
Without the casement, could he see,—
Snow-pure against brown stem and tree,—
The charmèd flowerage of that thorn
That ever on the Christmas morn
Is—for a memory and delight
Of the Lord's birth—with blossoms white

Transfigurate. And on a spray
There sat a mavis brown and grey,
That sang as if his heart were shed
Into his minstrelsy and fled
On wings of music heavenward,
A sacrifice of song outpour'd
To God most high.

Awhile it seem'd
To Floris he had surely dream'd
The coming of the dove to him
And all his strife against the grim
Fierce beasts, and all the after-bliss
And wonderment, and Christ His kiss.
But looking closelier, he was ware
At bed-head of his helm that bare
A silver dove with eyes of gold,
That on the crest did sit and fold
White wings above it; and he knew
The holy semblant on the blue
Of his fair shield, and eke the blade
Celestial, by his harness laid
Naked at bedfoot. So the doubt
Was from his spirit blotted out;
And he was surely certified
That verily he did abide
That wondrous venture, and had known
Awhile the glories that alone
For those that many a toil have dared

In Christ His service, are prepared
Within the city of the Grail,
Wherein is neither pain nor wail,
But ever holiness and peace
And ravishment without surcease,
In very perfectness of rest.

* * * *

So hath Sir Floris found his quest;
And so the tale is told and done,
Of how, before life's rest was won,
The first time unto Floris came
The holy dove, in Lord Christ's name.

Christmas, 1868.

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